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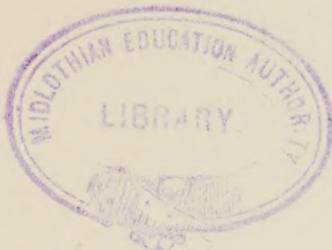
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THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK





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CLIMBING THE CROWBERRY RIDGE

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THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK

23023/941

BY

ERNEST A. BAKER, D.LIT., M.A.

*Author of "Moors, Crags and Caves of the High Peak,"
"The Netherworld of Mendip," etc.*

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



LONDON
H. F. & G. WITHERBY
326 HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.

1923

TO
THE MEMORY OF
VISCOUNT BRYCE
VINDICATOR OF
ACCESS TO MOUNTAINS

Manufactured in Great Britain.



PREFACE

THIS book was to have been dedicated, by permission, to the late Lord Bryce: now that it is finished, it can be dedicated only to his memory. The author is gratefully indebted to the Editors of *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Field*, *The Climbers' Club* and *The Cairngorm Club Journals* for permission to use matter that has appeared in articles, to Mr Alexander Inkson M'Connochie for useful information, to the photographers named for several of the illustrations, and to his daughter Ruth Baker for compiling the index.

The Scottish reader may be inclined to boggle at the spelling of certain Gaelic place-names. In apology, the author refers him to the remarks on page 68 and page 230, which may or may not satisfy him.

E. A. B.

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THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK

I—INTRODUCTORY

IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND

THIS book was in some sense begun more than twenty-five years ago, not long after my first visit to the Highlands; and to finish it now, to bring into any kind of order the fugitive records of rambles and climbs and haphazard holidays from that day to this, is no easy task. In such a period, though the highland hills stand fast as ever, the world and oneself change incredibly. The impressions of twenty-five years since are those of a different person. How, at this mature date, summon up again the careless zest, the glorious irresponsibility, of the gipsy-minded tramp pushing cheerfully into glens unknown of the tourist, with distant prospects of a bed at the end of the day in some forester's cottage, the alternative being a night spent on the hill-side? Harder still—though this may escape the reader who does not climb—to forget

the lore instilled by many years of scrambling, and revive the feelings of an unsophisticated time when we admired from afar the big precipices, and instinctively avoided them as if they were lions in wait; when we were well content to be wanderers at large, keen, of course, to reach the highest point, but satisfied if we reached it by ways that were safe and obvious.

In those days the excellent sport of rock-climbing had already many devotees; but I and my fellow-wanderers, even if we described ourselves as mountaineers, had not yet learned the game. We were not, however, of the opinion, which I have heard expounded as a pure æsthetic doctrine, that mountains are beautiful only at a distance, where the play of light and cloud upon their blended mass can be studied in all its subtlety, and the cliffs are subdued to picturesque accidents in the soft line of beauty curving from peak to col. The grandeur of mountains, like that of forests or cathedrals, is scarce half revealed to the gazer who stands without. We were drawn by the mysteries of their wild recesses, and explored far from the tourist track. Yet it was not in Scotland, but in mountaineering of a more intensive character, in rock-climbs on the fells of North Wales and the English Lakes, and scrambles on the gritstone edges of the Pennine, that we imbibed the passion for a closer intimacy, a new sense of the life of the mountains. For rock-climbing is not a mere athletic sport appealing to animal sensibilities and the delight

of struggle and accomplishment. It has a deeper attraction. To wrestle with the crags that frown on the cautious pedestrian, to force a way with body and limb up buttress, gully, and pinnacle, is to penetrate into the inmost sanctuary, to know the mountains as they really are, and to acquire a more profound sense of their beauty and sublimity.

It was only in the decade or so before that the mountains of Scotland, and even those of Cumbria and Snowdonia, were being discovered by climbers. Mountaineering had been well established for more than a quarter of a century, not merely as a special branch of geographical effort, but as an enthralling sport. The Alps and other mountain regions had been explored, and the majority of the highest peaks outside Central Asia had been conquered, largely by British climbers. But not till the last quarter of the nineteenth century was serious attention paid by British mountaineers to the climbing in their own country. Then, in the early nineties, one or two clubs were formed, and a volume or two appeared, precursors of the many devoted to mountaineering in these islands dating from the last twenty years. With their experience of high Continental peaks and of glacier and snowfield behind them, it was natural that British climbers should not be content with merely walking to the top of our native hills: some method of levelling up, some approach to the standards of difficulty and endurance which they were used to, was

inevitable, if the British hills, as the first writers on the subject claimed, were to be a training-ground for the Alps and the Caucasus. The methods invented of augmenting the arduousness of natural obstacles were mainly three: rock-climbing, which to the outsider simply means avoiding the obvious route and going up by the most dangerous and absurd; peak-bagging, or traversing as many summits of a recognised height as human endurance could compass in a given space of time; and winter mountaineering, which afforded some semblance of the snow and ice work encountered abroad. Peak-bagging never had more than a small number of votaries, and was peculiarly a Scottish pastime. Since the Highlands, according to the tables compiled by Sir Hugh Munro, comprise some 283 separate mountains and no less than 543 tops distinguished by individual names, all attaining the height of 3,000 feet above sea-level, whilst in England we cannot muster half a dozen candidates to that aristocratic altitude, the reasons for this are evident. Winter-climbing has made a somewhat wider appeal; but few have time to go holidaying at that season of the year. Hence by far the most popular of these more or less artificial forms of mountaineering has been, and continues to be, the first, rock-climbing. From the more conservative of the old school there were scoffs about mountain gymnastics and the greasy-pole business, and gibes at the hobnailed crowd who were turning the holy

places into a bear-garden, which gibes and scoffs may be accepted in all meekness, since at any rate they show a tender respect for the mountains.

But the mountaineer who eschews rock, at all events in Scotland, misses something that might have made him reverence and love the mountains still more. When we came back to the Highlands, my comrades and I, keen apprentices to the cragsman's art, we had new ideas and new standards. The man who climbs with hand as well as foot commands a double realm, unless he be foolish enough to remain a rock-athlete and nothing more: he keeps the old romance of the adventurer in trackless wilds, and is able to go with confidence on precipitous slopes and airy ridges that he used to shun. He can revel in the distant view, and he can walk securely in the grimdest mountain fastnesses, where Nature may be seen at work shaping the beautiful effects that look so well in the background of the picture which the æsthete prefers.

But it was some time before we attained that degree of expertness which nowadays the novice readily gains after a few climbs with approved leaders. The rock-climber had then to find out things for himself; routes were nearly all new, and the favourite climbs were not scored and polished with innumerable nail-marks. Although the Scottish Mountaineering Club had begun its exploration of the highland mountains, not one of us yet belonged to it or had earned the

qualification for membership; and the guide-books to British mountaineering, which now enable the aspirant to cram in a minimum of time for the most exacting test, had hardly begun to appear, and were still very far from tabulating and indexing the climbs on Scottish peaks.

This book is not intended as an addition to their number. It is not a vade-mecum to fresh routes; it chronicles few first ascents and no feats of endurance; but is simply a plain account of personal impressions. Many of the tramps and climbs described will sound elementary to the record-breaking peak-bagger and to the man addicted to courses of exceptional severity. But the pleasure of renewing past experiences is enhanced by the hope that it may convey some like pleasure to others who know or do not know the Highlands, and, above all, that it may express something of the charm and the infinite possibilities of enjoyment which that wonderful region holds for any who will boldly make their own way, beyond the radius of programmes and circular tours, even

Where roads are unknown to Loch Nevis.

But it requires boldness to leave the beaten track, more now than twenty-five years ago, and a great deal more than when the poet Clough and his fellow-undergraduates went

Ranging afar thro' Lochaber, Lochiel, and Knoydart, and Moydart.

The Scottish Highlands are the Alpine region of Britain; but, while the Alps have in the natural course of events become the playground of Europe, the Highlands have been allowed to fall into the hands of a class who seem incompetent to appreciate their grandeur and beauty, and have done their best to shut out the remainder of the human race by turning them into a huge game preserve. The lover of wild scenery who is enterprising enough to make his own way into the unknown will sooner or later come up against obstacles that do not exist in Switzerland; the climber who fancies that the principal Scottish peaks are as open to his prowess as the Wetterhorn or Monte Rosa will quickly find himself painfully disillusioned. The actual state of things is so extraordinary, and so little realised by those who do not know the Highlands—and that a hundredfold more do not know the Highlands is the most lamentable result of such a state of things—that it is desirable to dwell at some length upon it here, and consider the remedies that have been vainly put forward during the last thirty years. Comparison with the very different treatment meted out to climbers and other tourists in the mountain region of the Continent is enlightening.

Both regions are great natural parks. But the mountains and glens, the moors and forests of Scotland have been converted into a private park, with public access only to the mere fringes. Imagine

what Switzerland would have been had the Swiss allowed the mountainous portions, useless for agriculture or any other productive object, to become a great closed area where private individuals stalked deer, chamois, and bouquetin, during a month or two of the year. Suppose Tyrol and the French and Italian Alps likewise turned into a series of deer-parks. Mont Blanc would now be in much the same case as Mount Everest. As an act of grace, an influential scientific society might be permitted to send an expedition to climb it. The Matterhorn, the Jungfrau, the Dom, the Ortler, the Weisshorn, the Meije, would probably still be virgin peaks—and likely to remain so indefinitely, for nobody would have been fired with any incentive to climb them. The Alpine Club, with its numerous progeny of clubs all over the globe, would hardly have come into existence; nay, mountaineering itself would, in all probability, never have become a sport, since it was assuredly the Alps that begat and fostered it. Far more important, Europe would have been deprived of that area within its bounds where Nature is most lavish of splendour and majesty. Reckon up the loss to civilisation! Imagine the pleasures forgone! Think of the spiritual privation! And only a few visionaries here and there would have raised any outcry—to deaf ears, of course, for the public would be unimpressed by ideal and speculative arguments about things which they could not know at first hand.

Then, to come to more material considerations, what would the inhabitants of the Alpine countries not have lost, with what have turned out to be the real sources of their prosperity undeveloped? Although, to be sure, there would have been no lack of politic experts to point out how serious it would be to interfere with the steady income provided by sporting rents, the largesse disbursed by shooting tenants and their guests, and the wages paid to gamekeepers, gardeners, domestic servants, and the trades-people and artisans required for the regular upkeep of the mansions and shooting-lodges. The wealth brought into the country by these benefactors; the absurdity of thinking that Switzerland could be self-supporting, that crops could be raised in her remote and barren valleys, cattle fed on the slopes of the Alps, or trees grown in such a climate—all the old clinching arguments would be arrayed against any interference with things as they are. The smallness of the amount of wealth actually accruing would not be noticed, as the population of the country would have remained exceedingly small, and there would be no means of comparing the profit and loss under the established system with the results of an alternative economic system fundamentally different. There would be no agriculture worth mentioning, because agriculture interferes with sport, though the converse reason would be the one alleged. Cattle and sheep farming would be on the smallest scale. Industries would

scarcely exist; and the magnificent Alpine railways, together with all the vast and profitable machinery for the accommodation of tourists, would never have been thought of. Switzerland, in short, instead of being one of the most prosperous and contented, would now be one of the most backward countries in Europe; and the mountainous portions of the other countries would be an economic burden of uselessness only less grievous to be borne through being, happily, of smaller extent in relation to the whole.

And that is what the Scottish Highlands are at the present day. Their economic condition is, of course, not the direct concern of such a book as this. Our particular trouble is that we who live south of the highland line are prohibited from enjoying the wildest and most picturesque region in the British Isles in the same way as the whole of Europe can enjoy the Alps. But the economic question, indirectly, is very much our concern. If the Highlands were a prosperous and happy country, it might seem unbecoming for us in southern Britain to lament that we were debarred from roaming over soil dedicated to productive uses. But, when it is common knowledge and a subject of periodic complaint that the state of the Highlands is a wrong to humanity, it is very much to the purpose to point out that the country is neglecting its most valuable resource, its natural beauty, which might furnish as much pleasure to the world and bring in as much profit to its inhabitants.

as results from an enlightened policy in Switzerland. There is no exaggeration in saying that the deprivation which the British people sustain by the closing of the greater part of the Highlands is a social evil of the same kind and dimensions as would be the closing of the Alps to the people of Europe. Which are the chief sufferers, the outside world or the inhabitants who are robbed of any chance of prosperity and independence, is a question depending on the side from which it is considered. At any rate, the circumstance that the outside world is so little conscious of the deprivation makes it only the more serious. That is why in this book more stress will be laid on the question of access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands, in comparison with the grave economic problem, which must be treated very briefly. Be it well understood, however, that it is only outside Scotland that there is anything like complete indifference to either aspect of the question. A Home Rule Parliament in Edinburgh would, in spite of the intrenched forces of reaction, have settled the deer-forest question long ago, and with it the thorny questions of agricultural unemployment, poverty, congestion, and the loss of national wealth, which hinge directly upon it. The situation is recognised to be thoroughly uneconomic.

Whoever wishes to study the problem in all its bearings would do well to procure the documents issued by the Royal Commissions that have sat from

time to time on the subject, the debates upon successive Access to Mountains Bills, and if possible the articles and correspondence in the newspapers at the time of the Pet Lamb case in the nineties, Lord Pentland's Bill in 1911, and similar events that blew the smouldering discontent into flame. Though the Crofters' Commission of 1884 and the Highlands and Islands Commission of 1892 recommended that the spread of deer-forests should be checked, no action was taken; in truth, the net result of their findings was almost nil, the interests arrayed against any reform that would affect the landed monopoly being too formidable. During the last two decades of the century, the late Lord Bryce (then Mr James Bryce, M.P. for South Aberdeen) brought in, year after year, his Access to Mountains Bill, the object of which was stated in the preamble to be, "To secure to the public the right of free access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands, subject to proper provision for preventing any abuse of such right." "Apart from certain reasonable restrictions, no owner or occupier of such lands shall be entitled to exclude any person from walking or being on such lands for the purpose of recreation or scientific or artistic study, or to molest him in so walking or being." Only once, in 1888, and then by a mere chance, did it reach the stage of a second reading. In 1892, Bryce succeeded in carrying a resolution that legislation was needed; but when, in the following session, he

tried to give this practical effect by introducing a Bill, he was defeated by the Conservative ministry, who stated that they intended to bring in a Bill themselves. Their proposals, however, proved so disappointing, exempting the very months in which people want to visit the Highlands, that the champions of access to mountains declined to accept it. There was a more recent attempt by Mr C. P. Trevelyan to pass a similar measure, but this also met with no success. A Departmental Committee was, however, appointed in 1919, "to inquire and report with regard to lands in Scotland used as deer forests," and their report, issued in 1922, though conservative and timid in its proposals, in spite of the candid acknowledgment that the existing conditions are evil and their advice that no more deer forests should be allowed, contains an incisive summary of the question, including its history, and will doubtless provide material for more constructive schemes.

The reader must be asked to bear in mind what has already been pointed out, that there are two aspects to the deer-forest question, or rather that there are two grievances; the Royal Commissions and the Departmental Committee have considered one, the Access to Mountains agitation has been aimed at the other. The intention of the present writer is to plead that they hang together, and, if a broad view be taken, that the ultimate success of any remedies and the whole future of the Highlands depend on their being

combined. On the one hand, the peasantry have been dispossessed; the clansmen, the descendants of those who, till comparatively recent times, were joint owners of the soil with the chieftains, are denied any part or lot in the lands their forefathers tilled. The result has been poverty and starvation, and, finally, the depopulation of the Highlands. There is supposed to be an agrarian question in Ireland: if examined, it will be found far less tragic than that in the sister isle, but perhaps the Irish are less stoical. If statistics of emigration are any criterion of a people's happiness and prosperity or the reverse, then the Highlands have evidently suffered the more cruel treatment, in recent times, at any rate; for as long ago as 1906 it was found that, year after year, Scottish emigrants from the United Kingdom outnumbered the Irish. This and the immense loss in productiveness are the one grievance; on the other hand, there is the denial of access. Since this seemed chiefly to affect outsiders and those in quest of recreation, it was felt to be a minor evil; hence the tepid interest shown outside Scotland in Bryce's Bill. Very different would have been the public attitude had it been thoroughly realised that the whole population of the Highlands is indirectly affected, since, as long as the prohibition continues, the country is deprived of all opportunity for development on new lines. Directors of Scottish railways are always complaining that the Highlands are not popular: if they want the Highlands to be the

Switzerland of Britain, they must strive for the removal of these monstrous disabilities.

In the early decades of last century and before, the mountains and moorlands of Scotland were as free and open as the seashore. At that time there were only five ancient deer forests in the whole of Scotland, and the ground devoted solely to deer was high and poor and of no great area. Deer were plentiful, but lived for the most part in the wilderness, although they had the run of the whole country; and, by a system of give and take, the cattle were allowed on the high ground in the summer, so long as they were brought in winter to the lower valleys. In certain places there were other restrictions; in the Huntly forests, for instance, cattle had to be kept to the shielings at night; but, on the whole, the chief's sport interfered very little with the livelihood of the crofter and small farmer, and no one had any complaint. A large population inhabited the highland glens, a population that was happy and contented. They tilled the land and grazed their herds on communal or co-operative lines which were a legacy of the old clan system; the arable land being divided into small holdings or worked on the run-rig system, and the grazing being held in common. Rents were low, and were often paid partly in kind, and the inhabitants of the little townships had the right to summer their stock in the higher glens. This happy state of things began to come to an end in the latter half of the eighteenth

century. The first stage of the revolution which at length turned one-fifth of the entire soil of Scotland and the greater part of the highland country into a rich man's preserve was the creation of large sheep-farms and the expulsion of the old inhabitants to make way for the speculative farmer, who required only a handful of shepherds on land that had hitherto supported hundreds.

The tale of the highland clearances has often been told, and is now familiar to Scotsmen from Alexander Mackenzie's history, published in 1883, though the first-hand account, written by one of the eye-witnesses and victims, Donald Macleod, was long suppressed by powerful influences. To do it justice I should need the pen of a friend of mine whose grandfather was born in the heather, while his mother saw her home go up in flames, during the eviction on the Sutherland estates. This notorious Sutherlandshire business was carried through in the years 1814-18, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, in which the Sutherlandshire Highlanders had fought with distinction all oyer the world. To reap the profits offered by the high price of wool and beef, the English agents of the Duke cleared out the inhabitants wholesale, making room for the vast flocks and herds required by modern farming. Dispatch was necessary, to forestall the fluctuations of the market. Before the inmates could rescue their household goods, they saw their dwellings pulled down over their heads and set on fire, the wreckage, including

all that there was not time enough to save, being heaped up and burned. Some fifteen thousand persons were thus driven from their homes and the farms that had maintained them, and planted on the seashore to furnish the terrible crofter problem of later days. Elsewhere the same process went on; indeed, the process of depopulation has gone on to this day, for when sheep-farming on the great scale ceased to be lucrative, in the middle of last century, the formation of deer forests on a still larger scale led to a further reduction in the number of inhabitants required on the land.

For, before the whole of the Highlands was turned into an enormous sheep-walk, there were signs of a reaction in favour of the sportsman. Whilst in some parts the glens were being cleared of their human stock for the benefit of the large graziers, other glens were being cleared of sheep and cattle to make room for deer. The real advent of the great modern deer forest dates, however, from the time, in the seventies and eighties, when the price of wool and of sheep began to decline. Already it had long been the custom to let shootings to English tenants, the representative of the old patriarchal chieftain degenerating into a mere laird, who might be an absentee, living in London on the rent paid by the shooting tenant, or a kind of half-laird, half-factor, occupying the ancestral mansion while it was unlet, and keeping the premises and the estate in good condition for the moneyed magnate who

enjoyed it during the season. Usually, at any rate, it is not the descendant of the feudal chief, but the wealthy brewer or distiller, the financier or, now, the war-profiteer, who holds the Highlands in the hollow of his hand. As the case of a gentleman who purchased 50,000 acres from the Duke of Sutherland illustrates, the Canadian who wants "to hold a vast area for sport and to be lord of a solitude finds that Scotland provides a better opportunity than the great expanses of the West."

The vastness of the total area given over to deer forest is now, so the Report of the Departmental Committee shows, a little below the maximum registered in 1912, when it reached 3,584,966 acres, that is, one-fifth of the area of Scotland. There are now 189 scheduled forests, comprising 3,432,385 acres, of which, be it noted, one-third lies below the thousand-feet contour line. Out of 2,616,000 acres in Inverness-shire, more than a million are under deer. There were more deer in Scotland in 1914 than ever before in history. But the figures quoted do not give all the truth, for not all the mountains and moors where deer are shot come into the category of deer forest. Skye, for example, is not in the list; and many another estate where there are some cattle and some sheep escapes the obloquy attaching to the name. It is something to be thankful for that the word "deer forest" has lost its claim to instant respect, since, after all, public opinion will decide their future, and the

public is learning their record. The Departmental Committee considered the questions laid before them in an obviously conscientious and painstaking manner. Their point of view was, in the main, narrowly economic; that is to say, they carefully added up the returns of profit and loss, were solicitous not to suggest any change that might curtail the yield of rates, from forest or sheep-farm, for the maintenance of local government, and were far indeed from imagining any decisive alteration in the present regime. The idea of free access to the Highlands or of the infinite possibilities hingeing thereupon, does not seem to have entered their heads—they were not alive to any connection between Bryce's Bill and the state of the Highlands. They were exceedingly perturbed by the hopeless plight of the crofter, and convinced of the desirability that men should be settled on the land, as shepherds, as workers on the Government schemes for planting timber, or as small farmers or crofters; but the insuperable difficulty, as they see it, is the cost of housing such colonists. They are unable to avoid the misgiving that this might result in a deficit falling upon the landowners. It never seems to have occurred to them that vast estates, such as the 1,358,600 acres owned by the Duke of Sutherland, might very well make up any deficit in the provision of dwellings for the sons of those whose homes were demolished for the benefit of those estates.

But the members have been honest, at all events.

They will have nothing to do with the pretext that the growth of deer forests has been entirely the result of economic pressure. "In some cases," they point out, "the sporting tenants offered a rent higher than any farmer could afford to pay. In others sporting tenants bought up the rights of the adjoining sheep farmers. In others, farms were bought for the express purpose of creating deer forests. Even at the low prices then current, we are satisfied that a considerable part of the area afforested since 1892 could have been farmed at a profit after paying a moderate rent." They also say, "While the deer forests thus served a useful local purpose during the period of low prices (i.e., by yielding sporting rents and so contributing to local taxation) we consider that the total withdrawal of so large an area from pastoral uses was, from the national point of view, very much to be regretted. Its devotion to sport without restriction caused widespread dissatisfaction." This is putting it mildly; and when they calculate that "the annual diminution in production due to the existence of deer forests in 1920" amounts to a total value of £512,996, the Committee are far from reckoning up the real loss, which should, if there is anything in the arguments advanced in this chapter, be based on very different considerations.

The aim of the owners of deer forests is to create a huge solitude, first by removing such of the human population and their stock as survived the great clearances, and then by closing the mountains and glens to

the public. They have succeeded in doing this throughout large portions of ten counties. Of the 543 Scottish peaks attaining the Munro standard of 3,000 feet above sea-level, nearer five than four hundred are situated in this forbidden land. In the Rev. A. H. Macpherson's little book on Red Deer, it is argued by the late Lochiel that no one but "a very surly sort of fellow" would want to ascend mountains situated in deer forest, because "the most beautiful and fascinating" happen to be outside their circuit. The reverse of this careless statement would be nearer the mark. The most beautiful and fascinating mountains of Scotland are so inaccessible to the lover of nature, through the jealousy with which they are guarded by those who seem to have little eye for their beauty and fascination, that their very names are strange and uncouth to the tourist's ear. Suilven and Canisp, those marvellously coloured pyramids of western Sutherland; An Teallach, the most rugged and magnificent group on the British mainland; the purple sandstone mountains of Glen Torridon, unapproachable Liathach and Ben Alligin; Ben Eighe, the shapeliest cluster of peaks in the Highlands; Coulin Forest and the Fannichs, wildernesses of 3,000 feet tops; Scour Ouran, the Saddle, Ben Screel, Larven, each name standing for a dozen neighbours that must be nameless here: all these incomparable mountains are to be looked at from afar, but climbed at your peril. Then there is the multitude of peaks and ridges in central Ross, culmin-

ating in the Glen Affric giants, Mam Soul and Carn Eige, both nearly 4,000 feet high. Ross-shire alone contains ninety-five peaks of the 3,000 feet standard, of which it is doubtful whether one but Ben Wyvis can be ascended without fear of an interdict. The whole hinterland immediately north of Ben Wyvis, the map of which is dotted all over with lofty peaks, remains practically unexplored, even by the most enterprising members of the mountaineering clubs. Then in the middle of Scotland, mighty Ben Alder and his brethren are strictly prohibited, and it is the same with all but two summits in the Cairngorms, that glorious country which Sir Archibald Geikie called "the widest area of the wildest scenery in Britain." All the finest parts of this huge tract, which adjoins the chief health resorts in the Highlands, are in deer forest. Westward again, the peaks of Mamore and of Glencoe are proscribed. Buchaille Etive, on whose tremendous face is the best rock-climb in Scotland, has, since the fame of that climb reached the ears of its proprietor, been denied to the scrambler, like the neighbouring peaks of Black Mount Forest.

But it is not the mountaineer and the tourist alone who find themselves cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd if they venture on a holiday in Scotland. The people who go to the northern sanatoria, Braemar, Speyside, Blair Atholl, Fort William, and the many beautiful spots made accessible by the Highland and West Highland Railways, find themselves shut in on every side.

THE PEAKS OF MAMORE FOREST



With breezy heights and enchanting glens tempting them to stray, they are kept to the highway. Except for sedentary people, or those prepared to risk interference, a holiday in such places is intolerable. No wonder Switzerland and even Norway are more popular with the thousands who want healthy exercise and the enjoyment of scenery which they are not permitted to get in their own island! In the historic debate on deer forests, it came out that in the Braemar district the villagers were unable to obtain fresh milk for their children, and had to use Swiss milk, because the pastures were wanted to grow fodder for the winter feed of the deer. Tourists are stopped on unfrequented paths that are well-known to the inhabitants to be established rights of way, unscrupulous agents taking advantage of the stranger's ignorance. For a long while the public were warned off the excellent driving roads that intersect the attractive forest region of Rothiemurchus and Glenmore. So strict was the reign of terror maintained in this district of exquisite woods and waters, that even the humble cottagers, who made a little by taking in summer visitors, were kept in a state of nervous panic. My family have been refused rooms, engaged months in advance, when it leaked out that some of us intended to go on the hills. A lady who had been guilty of sketching in a glen celebrated for its grandeur, found that she could not get rooms next summer anywhere in the district. And the cottagers are not to blame, for the penalty would be

instant expulsion if they disobeyed the fiat. Recent reports of high-handed proceedings show that the spirit reigning there now is as arrogant as ever. One can but conclude, after studying the views of the sportsmen, that to them scenery and natural beauty and all that sort of thing are a confounded nuisance; if it could only be done away with, leaving them their shooting-ground and the deer, they would be perfectly happy, and there would be nothing left for the public to growl about—except the wrong to the evicted peasant.

So little regard have the persons who do these things for the indubitable rights of the public, that in one case in the Rothiemurchus region a highway passing in front of a shooting-lodge has been cut off by gates, and transformed by every artifice into the semblance of a private drive, with such success that even the local Jehus are taken in—or, perhaps, have to appear so. In Glen Lonan, near Oban, gates across a popular and well-authenticated high-road have been kept uniformly locked during the shooting season. Even in Skye we hear of interference with harmless pedestrians; keepers are stationed to warn tourists out of Harta Corrie; farm-houses, once convenient halting-places owing to the distance of the one hotel in the Coolin district, are now forbidden to take in lodgers; and a person who was encouraged to erect a movable hut for the convenience of mountaineers, when it came to the point, was refused permission to use it. How closely the watch is maintained

elsewhere is illustrated by the fact that a friend of mine was actually stopped on the King's highway in a famous glen and interrogated as to his movements by a forester, merely on the off-chance that he had been on the hills. In Glen Tanar, a late landowner built a house across the old road up the valley, with gates on either side. A right of way which he could not venture to stop leads across the glen higher up, from Ballater to Mount Keen. Where this intersects the old glen road he put up a notice warning tourists of the danger of getting shot. The island of Rum, the spires and pinnacles of which are such a familiar sight to the traveller by MacBrayne's steamers, is entirely closed. You cannot even land on this magnificent island, the most mountainous of all after Skye; ninety-seven per cent of its area is stated to be given up to deer and grouse, and the total population is less than a hundred. Accounts are given in a later chapter of memorable climbs and walks in Kintail and the adjoining glens, including one long tramp across Scotland by the ancient route between the territory of the Mackenzies of Kintail and Beauly. This walk from Beauly to the west coast, by way of Glen Affric and the superb pass of Glen Lichd, may well claim to be the finest in the British Isles. Ten years ago, the last hostelry that made a walk of such length barely feasible, the long-established Shiel Inn, was summarily closed—all the others had been shut up or robbed of their licences many years before. It is now

some fifty miles between the nearest fully-licensed house on this ancient right of way. The right of way has thus become useless, for the foresters who occupy the only habitations in the upper parts are strictly forbidden to give anyone a bed, and camping out would hardly be permitted. Tourists going to Kintail to explore the mountains have found absolutely nowhere to lay their heads, and have had to remove without delay to less inhospitable climbing districts.

One could fill a book with accounts of individual acts of tyranny. The whole of the Highlands, in brief, is groaning under the yoke; and, if there are certain mountains and many square miles of scenery not enclosed by deer forests, not much is free from the still less pardonable jealousy of those who own grouse-moors. In the nineties, it was useless for a man to contest a seat in the north unless he were "sound on Bryce's Bill." Opinion was overwhelmingly in its favour; petitions were signed by crowds of all classes, and discontent was at fever-heat. At that time people had an object-lesson before their eyes in the conglomeration of deer forests created by the American millionaire, W. L. Winans, in Strathfarrar and Kintail, with its 200,000 acres of subject territory guarded by an army of sentinels. The pet lamb case was in everyone's mind, how the millionaire prosecuted the humble crofter for letting his children's lamb stray upon the huge, fenceless tract of Scotland that had been dedicated to the stag. But, though this vast domain has

been broken up and the army disbanded, there is no less severity in the management of particular estates. There are now about forty more deer forests, despite the slight decline from the maximum in 1912, and nearly a million more acres are scheduled. So much for the results brought about by the recommendations of Royal Commissions. Will the very moderate proposals of the Departmental Committee have more salutary effect?

Restoration of the right of public access to mountains and moorlands would not destroy deer forests; nor indeed would a truly economic handling of the Scottish land question do more than reduce the inordinate claims of sport to reasonable limits, limits consistent with the British public's rightful claim to space for rational modes of enjoyment and rational methods of recreation, and consistent also with the existence of a thriving population as of yore in the highland glens. Would it be any real detriment at all to the forests? The mountain regions would not be quite the utter solitude they now are from one side of Scotland to the other. That would be the net result. The aristocratic, or rather the plutocratic sportsman might now and then have the painful experience of catching sight of a fellow-creature where once he was monarch of all he surveyed. But his shooting-ground would still be there, unimpaired in extent by the mere liability to public access, and probably not a penny the worse in value. Although deer-stalkers have themselves

confessed that the wayfarer without a gun does not really interfere much with the shooting, it may be admitted as a bare statement of fact that at the crucial moment of a stalk the apparition of an intruder might be disastrous. But, even if the top of a remote Ben in a highland forest were likely to be as popular as the summit of Monte Rosa or the Finsteraarhorn, an incident so intensely vexatious as that is of the very unlikeliest; for, after all, the people who climb high and remote peaks are just as good sportsmen as is the man with a gun, and would instinctively avoid interfering with other people's pleasures.¹ There is no fear of letting loose to desecrate Scottish mountains the rabble who have spoiled Snowdon: there will be no Snowdon in Scotland so long as there is no capitalist to run railways up mountains and plant so-called hotels at the top. The person who would benefit by access to mountains is of a very different type, and of a type that it is a social duty to develop.

Those who are familiar with the habits of the red deer, and how little he is disturbed by mere passers-by, are of opinion that the probable damage to be feared from tourists would be so slight, taken all round, as to be out of all proportion to the immense relief experienced by the public. Lord Elcho, who said he

¹ A gentleman who knows as much about deer and deer-stalking as anyone alive writes to me, "By having all present restrictions removed grouse-shooting would not be interfered with; deer-stalking (*much too tame under present conditions*) would become real sport."

was sure that considerable harm would be done by promiscuous wandering in a forest during the shooting season, also stated, "I have had a great deal of conversation with landlords, proprietors, and lessees of shooting, and they agree with me that in the large majority of cases the deer forests will not be materially injured if the proposal of the hon. member for Aberdeen be carried out." The verdict of the Departmental Committee on this much-debated point is to the same effect:

"The idea that a deer forest must be entirely sacred to deer appears to be quite modern, and based to a large extent on ignorance of the habits of deer and confusion between the art of creating and the art of maintaining a forest. To induce deer to settle on new ground it must be left quiet, but their progeny bred on the ground are not so easily driven from what they regard as their home. A relatively small sanctuary is sufficient to maintain them, provided reasonable consideration is shown in the handling of the sheep and other stocks."

Their views as to the alleged disturbance to be apprehended from sheep, if sheep-farming is once again combined with deer-forestry, may be quoted here :

"The presence of sheep certainly renders the planning and execution of a stalk more difficult, but most sportsmen will admit that the deer need some compensation for the introduction of the high-velocity rifle,

and will even welcome a new difficulty in a sport of which difficulty is the essence."

The Highlands are, for the most part, one vast forest, since there are in the majority of cases no fences to prevent the herds from ranging across Scotland from one side to the other. What is really dreaded is, thus, that the deer may be sent off the ground. That danger is obviously of a limited kind. They are not likely, as the report just quoted points out, to be so badly scared by casual tourists as to quit their pastures altogether. Only occasional and temporary disturbance is to be feared; the very worst that can be imagined as a result of public access is that a man with "unpicturesque hills" might, in rare instances, improve his stock slightly at his neighbour's expense. The owner of a great forest practically gave the whole case away when he admitted, "if tourists avoid the sanctuary, they might go anywhere else without real harm." No reasonable person would object to a provision or understanding as to the sanctity of sanctuaries, although the public might justly claim the liberty to go anywhere, as of old, before this right had been stealthily and by means of no definite enactment filched away. Anyhow, to close whole districts for the sake of keeping a small part inviolate is the height of unreasonableness.

Coming back to the social and economic side of the question, we find that there has been no remission of the inhuman pressure on the inhabitants of the glens,

and no check to the depopulation of the Highlands, since the period of the great clearances: the deadly work has gone steadily on; and, if the rate of extermination has been slightly reduced at any time since 1850 or 1870 or 1900, it has only been because there was a smaller population left to extinguish. The Departmental Committee ascertained that the number of employees actually engaged on the deer forests is 881 full-time and 1,178 occasional workers—gillies and the like. With the coming of the deer forest there was a renewal of emigration. Terrible facts came to light in the examination of witnesses when the Royal Commissions were sitting, of which a few may be cited as examples.

A delegate from the crofters in Strath Halladale, Sutherlandshire, told the Commissioners in 1892 that 45,000 acres of this valley had been turned into a sheep farm, let to an absentee, and 8,000 acres of that area were subsequently turned into deer forest. Sixty families had formerly supported themselves in comfortable circumstances on this land. The middle portion of the strath had been secured to the crofters under the Crofters Act; the area on either side, which had once been so fruitful, was now a desert. Another witness was Colin Chisholm, a man of eighty, who was one of those driven out from Glen Cannich in 1832, when that beautiful glen, together with Strathglass and Glen Strathfarrar, was cleared. He said—let his statement stand for what it is worth—“I have seen the

finest oats I ever saw, south or north in England or Scotland, growing in the dales of Glen Cannich, the finest potatoes and the finest turnips. . . . The whole of the glen except one small farm is at present a deer forest. In my early recollection there were 33 tenant farmers and 12 families of cottars in the said glen, making a total of 45 families. They educated their families tolerably well. In my own time there were 17 Glen Cannich men who held commissions in Her Majesty's army." He handed in the names of the families. On part of what is now the huge Guisachan Forest, "so recently as 1855 there were 16 tenants and 6 cottars and dependants. They had 62 cows, 24 horses, and 4,200 sheep amongst them." In Strathglass there were seven meal-mills; now there is one. From Glen Strathfarrar, Chisholm's brother stated, Fraser of Lovat got two hundred volunteers to fight with Wolfe at Quebec: "The glen would not provide two to-day." The Chisholm estate, held by the modern representative of the old clan chieftains, the late Mrs Chisholm, comprised 113,000 acres, of which 80,000 were devoted solely to deer. To this potentate the poor people of Cannich sent a petitioner in the person of the Free Church minister, humbly praying that she would grant grazing for one cow, and potato-ground, to some ten men in the district. The inhabitants of the hamlet could only get milk for their children from a distance. The application was couched in the meekest terms, and the villagers were evidently

loath to address any appeal to the Commission then about to sit. It met with a blank refusal. The factor on the estate explained to the commissioners that it was impossible to re-establish men on the patches of arable land on the fringes of the forest, because they were required for the wintering of the deer. Better had the fathers and grandfathers of these cottars gone with the many hundreds of their kindred who from 1801 to 1803 sailed in great shiploads to Nova Scotia and Upper Canada.

On the Balfour estate of Strathconan, 27 families, a community of 123 persons, were ejected at one fell swoop, some to emigrate, the others to settle on miserable crofts in the Black Isle, where they kept themselves alive on plots of land reclaimed from the heather. An old man remembered how 800 people over sixteen years of age signed the roll when a new minister was inducted. Now there were a hundred square miles of deer forest, employing a small number of men as gillies; the sheep were almost entirely gone, and only about two shepherds were employed. In the parish of Contin, which includes Strathconan, the population was 2,023 in 1831; by 1902 it had fallen to 514, and by 1911 to 445. In the old days, this was one of the best districts for the ripening of crops; and for every £20 of rent there were 150 sheep and three milch cows. "In the township that I was on," said the deponent, "it was only a year or two under sheep (i.e., after the clearance of the small men for the big sheep

farm) before it was put under deer after the small tenants left."

Vast sheep farms not yet given over to deer, and shooting ground not scheduled as forest, are responsible for a desolation almost as complete. In ten years, from 1901 to 1911, the population of Inverness Landward dropped from 5,801 to 3,736. The pluralist farmer and then the sportsman drove the McKintosh clan from their old seat in Strathnairn. An estate supporting some 300 people was bought by an English colliery owner sixty years ago; the inhabitants were ejected by the process of raising rents, the village is now a heap of ruins, and deer wander where the sheep and cattle grazed. So was it with the neighbouring homes of the McGillivrays—they are gone, but the grouse and the red deer remain. It is the same story from Inverness-shire to Wester Ross, and away into Caithness and Sutherlandshire. Wheresoever the tourist or the climber wanders, he will come across innumerable larachs, heaps of stones half-buried in moss and heather marking the sites of old hamlets. If you see a flourishing birch-wood, make sure that it does not conceal the remains of a hamlet or farmstead. No one would plant such useless timber as a birch-tree; but the first thing to spring up on unoccupied ground is a dense crop of seedling birches. Quantities of good land lie buried away in the forests: a friend who is a first authority on the subject, and much more interested in deer than in the restoration of agriculture, admits that there are a

million reclaimable acres in the area at present held for sport. What are the total numbers of those driven from the land I do not know; but I learned a year ago from a professor of divinity in Nova Scotia that in one part of that country there are now 30,000 people whose only language is Gaelic—far more, that is to say, than could now be found in the whole of Scotland.

The Highlands all one hunting ground,
Where men are few, and deer abound,
And desolation broods profound,
O'er the homes of the men of Culloden.

There must be something vicious in an economic system the by-product of which is that amazing anachronism, a country of the size of the Highlands stripped of its inhabitants, its natural resources squandered, and the whole turned into a rich man's preserve. Is there anything like it elsewhere on the face of the globe? On the fringes of the pleasure-ground, on the seashore, and in the barren islands, the relics of the old population are living in miserable cabins—those who are not among the small number employed on the great sporting estates—and fighting a losing battle with poverty and starvation. Great modern castles and mansions stand ready to receive the lord of the deer forest and his guests during the six weeks or two months of the season. Finely engineered roads wind away into the glens, bridges worthy of Telford cross rivers and torrents, telephone poles lead to the distant shooting-lodge or bothy—all the

apparatus of luxury is there, representing an enormous expenditure of wealth, lavished, not on any productive or social object, but simply on the pastime of a few people who are determined to keep out and keep under the many. No wonder "They don't want the public up there": as the son of a Duke's favourite stalker observed to me, "They don't want people to know what is hidden away in the Highlands." To say that the Highlands are still under feudalism would be unfair to the feudal system. That may have been oppressive, but its spirit was protection, and between the feudal chief and his retainers there was something akin to the patriarchal feeling of the old clan regime. But the system that reigns now in the Highlands is one of indifference, if not of hostility. Such loyalty as exists depends entirely on the cash nexus, and the natural results of this are being seen of late in their most revolting form. No finer men could be found anywhere in the British Isles than the Highland forester or gillie of a quarter of a century ago—men of grand physique, inured to fatigue and exposure, intelligent and courteous to a degree rare in that rank of life. To-day, with forests changing hands perhaps from season to season; with new tenants coming for the weeks of shooting, and with their mob of guests flinging money—and whisky—about wholesale, deterioration is setting in—greed, servility, and contempt for all but their paymasters, such is the inevitable product of callous indifference and self-indulgence.

What remedies are proposed? Well, that is scarcely the subject for a book of this kind; but some of those put forward may be enumerated. Royal Commissions have sat, and their recommendations have resulted in next to nothing; they were too conservative, or too timid to face the real problem or frame a constructive solution. Nothing much ever will be done until the problem is considered in all its aspects and implications, social and economic, and considered with unflinching honesty and far-sighted courage. The deer forests and the sporting interests are on their defence, and justice will never be done so long as the defendant is given a seat on the bench. Impartiality is required, in the first place, and there must be knowledge and imagination; otherwise, the matter will be judged elsewhere. At present, the landed interests are asking for trouble; it is they who are heading for revolution.

One of the suggested remedies has already been discussed; mere access to the mountains and moorlands might remove a painful inconvenience; it is inadequate to cure a deep-seated disease. Another proposal is the abolition of the game laws. This would be a violent and questionable remedy, which cannot be guaranteed to furnish the positive incentives that would be required for a new state of things. The favourite prescription of the advanced economist is the scientific taxation of land values. This measure would probably be carried out at once, if the Scottish people were at liberty to decide upon their own affairs. Its merits cannot be

discussed here; but it is noteworthy that the Departmental Committee have such a tenderness for the proprietors of deer forests that they would relieve them of some of their present burden of taxation. The Committee have given their attention to certain constructive schemes, such as land settlement and forestry, which they prefer to call sylviculture, but they are alarmed by the initial costs of an enterprising attempt at either scheme. The thousands of homes that were pulled down or left to go to ruin by the landowners when they introduced sheep farming on the large scale, and later when they turned their estates into deer forest, have left a formidable housing problem to the present generation. A good beginning has been made with sylviculture, three deer forests having been taken over for the planting of timber. The Committee says: "Where the ground is suitable for sylviculture, production could be increased by this agency to a point far beyond the pastoral value, while the labour absorbed by the creation, maintenance, and utilisation of timber crops would surpass by many times that required for the service of sheep farms or deer forests." They also say, "We are convinced that very large areas of good planting land may be found in the deer forests. By no other method can the productive value of the deer forests be increased in the same degree."

But they might have gone further and initiated a more profound and decisive change for the better, had they possessed the courage of a member of the Royal

Commission of 1892, who added the following postscript to the report by his colleagues :

“ The joint right of the highland clansmen with the landlords to the land has, so far as existing crofters are concerned, been recognised, and to some extent been given effect to by the Crofters Act. But with respect to the land cleared for sheep and deer, and constituting an area much more extensive, valuable, and fertile than that presently in the occupation of crofters, the landlords have appropriated the clansmen’s rights and interests in it without payment or compensation of any kind. The solution of the highland problem is not land purchase, but resumption of the clansmen’s right to occupy the Fatherland. It is an inexpensive solution, and one that would not impoverish, but might ultimately benefit, the landlords, seeing that the return from the large grazings is a constantly diminishing quantity, and many of them, well suited for crofters’ holdings, are admittedly unlettable.”

The first step is restoration. Scotland once had vast forests of timber, mouldering relics of which are visible all over the desolate Moor of Rannoch, high up in the Cairngorm mountains, and in numerous other regions where now there is not a tree. To some considerable extent, in spite of climatic changes, these can be replaced under scientific forestry; in the same way as the small farmer or the cottar, with his joint holdings and joint grazings, can be restored to the

glens. With the real opening up of the country as a vast pleasure-ground for the urban population of Britain, there will be an epoch-making development. At present, a holiday in the Highlands is more expensive than a holiday in Switzerland, and incomparably less delightful on account of artificial restrictions and the absence of reasonable facilities. All this is due to the sporting incubus. The tourist is not wanted in the real Highlands, and there is precious little room for him and his family on the outskirts. Inns and hotels have been closed wholesale, the others are congested during the too brief season; many of them are extremely bad, and their charges as high as if they provided first-class accommodation. Many highland hotels leave a strong impression on the minds of their victims that they must be run by descendants of the old caterans. The facilities for holiday makers of small means, such as exist in the English Lake District and in North Wales, are not to be found in the Highlands, except perhaps at suburbanised places like Pitlochry or Aberfoyle. Camping out is an almost unheard-of thing. There are, one gladly admits, notable exceptions among the hotels, as the following pages will perhaps indicate; comfortable old-fashioned inns, like Dundonnell, and still more delightful places of sojourn, such as Sligachan—both of them, be it observed, haunts of the climbing fraternity.

No doubt, when the goal is better worth reaching the means of reaching it will be improved. The rail-

way service is perhaps as good as the traffic can fairly demand. Faster trains can hardly be expected in mountainous country; but the connections between train and steamer seem to be designed for the express purpose of leaving the traveller stranded and at the mercy of some hotel where he does not want to stay, when he might be proceeding to his destination. On the west coast, the steamboat service is far more backward than when William Black wrote his novels fifty years ago. The old *Claymore*, of which we read in his classic pages, is still the one and only boat that takes you north to Gairloch and Lochinver—at fortnightly intervals. There is a charm about the old boat—she literally carries our memories back half-way to Sir Walter Scott—but it is not exactly the charm we hanker after in these days of brief holidays and urgent hurry to make the most of them. Other things bear one back in imagination to the days of the reivers. There is buccaneering in the Alps, and probably everywhere where people go pleasure-seeking; but it can hardly compete in extent and impudence with the way toll is exacted on every pretext from the traveller in the Highlands. You cannot land from the steamboat, in the majority of places, without being challenged to stand and deliver by some owner of a jetty. And there is no escape from any of them. You are at their mercy, for they have to make a living, and the time for making it is short. Some day, no doubt, it will be discovered that there is no reason why highland hotels

and boarding-houses should be empty all but two or three months of the year. All up the west, the mean temperature in winter is higher than in the Isle of Wight, though there is snow for ski-ing on the hill-sides. In the better days to come there will doubtless be winter sports, as well as climbing and other kinds of recreation at Easter and other times when the region now is deserted.

The reader may perhaps wonder how my friends and I managed to get about in the way described in the following pages, if the obstacles to travel are so serious. The explanation is that we were more enterprising than the average tourist, and prepared at a pinch to rough it. We also learned by harsh experience how to avoid difficulties; and, like the late Sir Leslie Stephen, we were not imbued with any "superstitious reverence for legal rights." Under stress of circumstances we committed some lawless things—even a burglary on one occasion—such as might have tempted a proprietor of the right stamp to put a shot through us in mistake for a deer. Years ago, diplomacy went farther than it does now. At present the embargo in certain districts on affording sustenance to tourists is absolute. It is more than a forester's place is worth to give the tourist errant a shakedown. But a number of the long tramps recorded in far distant glens were performed in the company of a canny Scot who was a master of the art of discovering a link of relationship, often very far removed, but near enough

for the purpose, which touched an answering chord and evoked hospitality in highland breasts. His very name proved at times an Open Sesame. With him I have slept in head keeper's lodges in the heart of the most sacred territory, and roamed where we were actually the first tourists ever seen, and perhaps the last to this day.

Scott was the first great advertiser of the Highlands, and readers of the "Lady of the Lake" and of the Waverley novels went there to look for the picturesque and the romantic for themselves. But the Highlands now make a deeper appeal. The eighteenth century hated the mountains; the nineteenth century learned to love and worship them. Directly from the Wordsworthian fount or through the poets and novelists who followed, the intellectual classes drank the new spirit, and it is gradually filtering down to the masses. It is not mere rage for athletics that has begotten so many mountaineering and rambling clubs, but a more or less conscious desire for communion with Nature. This has had no small part even in the growth of such things as the Scout movement. Why, the enthusiastic allotment-holder, of whom there are many thousands now, is not animated merely by utilitarian motives. As one of them said to me the other day, "It brings one closer to Nature." The despised tripper is in the first stage of his education: may he and his children proceed to a more enlightened stage.

This growing sense of the loveliness and worshipfulness of nature, this desire for a closer intimacy,

Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man;
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature,

must be satisfied, or our masses will remain barbarous.

II

FROM LORNE TO LOCHABER

Between Lochowé and Etive how that pile
 Fills all the interspace! and bars
With his great feet yon river-girt defile,
 His lonely forehead communing the while
 With cloud and sun and stars.

—“Ben Cruachan” by PRINCIPAL SHAIRP.

Two things were impressed on the mind by my first experiences in the Highlands, nearer thirty than twenty-five years ago, in a fortnight’s ramble with two friends in Benderloch and Lochaber—the need to plot out routes and distances on the map carefully beforehand, and the probability that our calculations would all be falsified. We had prepared, not only a programme, and a very ambitious one, but also a time-table. The latter we found had only theoretic value, and no relation to facts; most of the items in the former were never accomplished, though fortune was good to us, and the unexpected made ample amends. Another lesson we learned was that the best things to look back upon are those which promised badly at the time: what should we not have missed had we depended unduly on propitious weather!

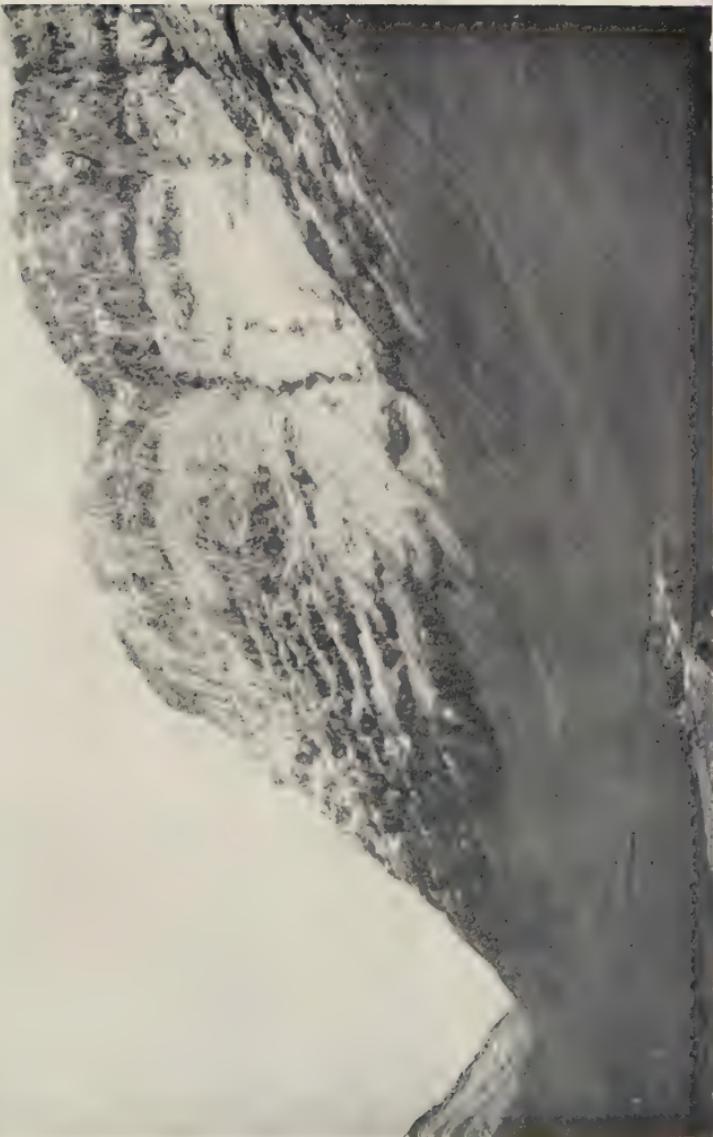
Our first object was Ben Cruachan, the outermost of the wilderness of peaks stretching from Loch Awe and the Pass of Brander, which sunder it from the picturesque hills of Lorne, to Ben Nevis and the other great heights of Lochaber. But mist hung persistently along the sides of the mountain, and from the Taynuilt inn on the other side of the River Awe there was for days no glimpse of the summits. So one morning we got breakfast long before the hotel was properly awake, and set off merrily on a tramp up Glen Etive and over a pass to Glencoe. Trouble was awaiting us at the outset. Our way was up the roadless margin of Loch Etive on the far side, and, first of all, Bunawe ferry had to be crossed, where the loch turns westward to the sea. Now the first precaution to be observed by a wise ferryman in choosing his place of abode is that it shall be on the opposite side of the water to that from which most passengers come; else he will be at everyone's beck and call, day and night. The cottage on the other bank was as silent as the grave. We made its walls re-echo till we were tired of shouting, and then sat down to await the pleasure of this unexpected obstructor to our well-planned schemes. It was a depressing morning. Ben Cruachan and the hills of Benderloch over against us were still wrapped in their misty night-gear, and a damp breeze was coming down the river. After a long hour the canny old highlander consented to wake. He rowed leisurely over, and to our

expostulations replied very phlegmatically that he had been to a friendly meeting the night before. This, we were to learn, was a full and sufficient explanation of any delinquencies in the public service in the Highlands. We were put ashore on the rocky peninsula where the labourers in the Bunawe granite-quarries live, and pursued our way as philosophically as we could after being robbed of an hour in bed for nothing.

Few footfarers ever go this way, though there is a rough road beyond the head of the loch, which is usually reached by boat. We had calculated the day's walk on the length of Loch Etiye from Bunawe to the top, blissfully ignoring the vagaries of an almost invisible track, which kept disappearing into old stream-beds, and drove us often in desperation to the boulders at the loch-side, to avoid the dense under-growth in the forest or bogs on the open slopes. Thus it was afternoon before we struck into the abominable road, and reached the spot where the two Buchailles push into the narrowing glen and turn it eastward—a spot walled in with cliffs rent by precipitous gullies, down which torrents were streaming out of the clouds. Here there was a cottage, where we tried to get refreshment, and were refused, till one of the party bethought him to play on a minor chord and appeal to highland hospitality. Milk and scones were the appreciative response. A rash ejaculation about the scenery drew the comment,

“ Eh? beautiful you call it! You wouldn’t say it if you lived here!”

From the larig or rough track through the hills, just before the rugged descent into Glencoe begins, we had our first peep into the heart of the mountains. Between shifting folds of mist we looked into a high corrie, cliff-walled and half-filled with snow, telling of grim weather in the regions above. The peaks of Bidean nam Bian kept sternly invisible. But this was the right sort of day for Glencoe, which looks its finest when the walls are heightened to the imagination by a veil of mist stretched below their crest, and the black corries between the great spurs of Bidean look even blacker from patches of last winter’s snow. Not one tourist in a hundred sees Glencoe as it should be seen, at least nowadays. Thirty years ago, when there was no railway through Appin to Ballachulish, and the West Highland was not yet open to Fort William, such traffic as there was came by coach through the pass, from the east. The colossal buttresses plunging down to the bottom of Glencoe, which give such incomparable grandeur to the view from that side, are so shaped that the western face is tame and uninteresting. And that is all the unwary tourist who now rides in a motor char-à-banc from Oban and Ballachulish is allowed to see. A mile or so below the point where the scenery begins, a flat piece of ground well-marked with wheel-ruts shows where the vehicles are turned, and the defrauded



CLIFFS ABOVE THE CLACHAIG, GLENCOE

passengers are taken home again innocently believing that they have seen Glencoe.

We reached the little Clachaig inn early enough for dinner; early enough, indeed, for two of us to go out in the twilight and climb a thousand feet of the opposite slope to get a better sight of Ossian's Cave, high up in the sheer face of Aonach Dubh; after having decided on the spot where David Balfour and Alan Breck, in "*Kidnapped*," made their famous jump across the linn and dodged the redcoats. Next morning breakfast was eaten before five o'clock, and we caught the early steamer to Fort William.

Ben Nevis was, in fact, our first mountain; but a dull, dogged trudge up four thousand feet of pony-track was not mountaineering. It is, however, a formal incident in every well-behaved tourist's first visit to the western Highlands; and, though we were rewarded with but one fleeting glimpse of a far sea-loch through a rent in the mist, we felt we had paid our respects to the monarch and done our duty. It was a great many years later that I went up Ben Nevis by a route that brings out the full grandeur of the mountain, and even then, as I was alone and burdened with a camera, it was necessary to give a wide berth to the sporting climbs on the huge north-east precipice. By this time the hostelry at the summit together with the observatory had been abandoned, and the bridges over ravines on the tourist track had fallen into such a neglected state

that a notice was posted at the foot warning the public that they must use the path only at their own risk.

Half-way up, the climber, not the tourist, skirts the tarn behind the great shoulder Meall an t-Suidhe, and descends into the corrie between Ben Nevis and its gigantic neighbour, Carn Mor Dearg.¹ Than this vast rocky hollow, overhung for two miles by the enormous crags of Carn Dearg and Ben Nevis, there is nothing finer in the British Isles. Alpine plants find a safe refuge here; rare ferns grow in masses; and the wet rocks beside the burns are draped in sheets of moss of all colours, from the darkest purple and bronze to bright pink and vivid green. Deep snow-wreaths lie in the upper corries throughout the year. The legend is that Lochiel holds the mountain on the feudal condition that he should supply snow at any time on demand from the crown. Here, since the early nineties, numberless climbs of all degrees of difficulty have been worked out on the buttresses and ridges and up the gullies and chimneys of the north-east face, none of which it has been my luck to attempt. The scramble on to the sharp knife-edge of the arête from Carn Mor Dearg was safe enough for a climber single-handed: thence the way to the summit, up hundreds of feet of accumulated boulders, was laborious but straightforward. This second

¹ Pronounced *jérak*.

ascent of Ben Nevis was not fruitless, though one might climb the mountain many times and return empty-handed, so far as a view is concerned.

The weather was still disgruntled when two of us got back to Taynuilt, the third man taking this as a good excuse for a day of sloth. Ben Cruachan was still muffled in his dark mantle, and, after some debate, my comrade announced that he should keep out of the clutches of the mist and go photographing in the glen. But holidays were short, and I did not feel inclined to forgo the climb we had planned up the difficult side of Ben Cruachan, facing Glen Noe, which was said to be immensely superior in sporting qualities to the ordinary routes on this side. Ben Nevis by the track hardly counted; so this was to be my first real climb on a mountain.

The woman who ferried me across the Awe stared with evident curiosity when she set me on the shore of Loch Etive, for the intentions of a solitary wayfarer, on such a day, on the trackless side of the loch were by no means obvious. But loneliness is the right recipe for the enjoyment of scenery. "Loch Etive, you must know," says Christopher North, who must have been here in better weather, "is one of the many million arms of Ocean, and bright now are rolling in the billows of the far-heaving tide. Music meet for such a morn and such mountains. Straight stretches the glen for leagues, and then, bending through the blue gloom, seems to wind away with one sweep into

infinity. The Great Glen of Scotland—Glen More itself—is not grander."

Another lover of Glen Etive, Christopher's contemporary, Macculloch, was moved by its scenery to a characteristic digression on the sublime and the beautiful:

"There is a gigantic simplicity about the whole scene, which is very impressive, and which would render the presence of those objects and that variety which constitute picturesque beauty, intrusive and impertinent. I know not that Loch Etive could bear an ornament without infringement on that aspect of solitary vastness which it presents throughout. Nor is there one. The rocks and bays on the shore, which might elsewhere attract attention, are here swallowed up in the enormous dimensions of the surrounding mountains and the wide and simple expanse of the lake. A solitary house, here fearfully solitary, situated far up in Glen Etive, is only visible when at the upper extremity; and if there be a tree, as there are in a few places on the shore, it is unseen; extinguished, as if it were a humble mountain flower, by the universal magnitude around."

Rain began soon after I had rounded the end of the mountain and had left the loch behind to ascend Glen Noe, which winds, a deep, desolate hollow between the scarped north front of Cruachan and the desert hills of the deer forest. Clouds hung low along both sides, and boded little good to the

venturer within their folds. Skirting the north-east shoulder, I found myself at the mouth of a combe running far into the mountain. Two high ridges, their heads lost in the mist, walled this in on either hand, and down their sides, and down the steep slope at the upper end, foamed three burns in full spate. The boggy bottom of the combe seemed also to be in spate, and, by the time I reached the granite slabs down which ran the middle stream, any amount of drenching, short of lying down beneath a waterfall, would hardly have increased my degree of humidity. The mist had come right down, or rather I had gone up to meet it, and the wind was blowing fine rain in my eyes with blinding force. Wretched is the state of the spectacled man on the hills in one of these wet mists; his glasses are first obscured with tear-drops, and at last stream with rain and perspiration, till he cannot see much better than a diver at the bottom of the Thames at Woolwich.

Some two thousand feet of this sort of work led up to a rocky brow, through which the stream cut an evil-looking channel that forbade approach. To left and right, far as the limits of vision, stretched heaps of broken rocks and drifts of scree; above, the outline of a cliff frowned vaguely. I soon found myself at the base of a sheer rock-wall, of undistinguishable height, apparently a bar to further progress in that direction. I tested some attractive ledges, but, as it was impossible to see what lay beyond, I came back, and pursued my

way across the wilderness of stones. Even at this point, I debated with myself, it might after all be better to return to sea-level by the quickest route; but a wet scramble down the margin of the burn was a prospect that spurred in the other direction. So I kept patiently on, and at length reached the foot of a snow-lined gully cutting at a sharp angle through the cliffs. It proved too smooth and steep to be climbed without the aid of a friendly shoulder. But behind the great rock-pier walling it on the left appeared a second slit, equally steep, but narrow enough to be climbed with back and knee against the opposite sides. There was an exciting sense of uncertainty as to what lay in wait above; but, the narrow portion of the gully surmounted, there was nothing but a rough scramble over loose stuff in a widening funnel; and then, what a relief it was to see the ground break away immediately in front, and to feel that the cold blast which saluted my face was blowing up from the Pass of Brander!

I was on the summit ridge; but whereabouts? The top is several miles long: hence the importance of the question. Turning westwards along the ridge, I soon distinguished a pyramidal mass of rocks looming up, which I recognised with some confidence as the Tay-nult summit, Stob Dearg (3,611 feet), and so opined that I had not gone far astray, and must be on the saddle between the two main peaks. It is the grandest part of the mountain, as I realised in my next ascent of Ben Cruachan, on a day the very antipodes of

this. Now, the utter isolation bred a poignant sense of awe and solemnity that a day of sunshine and far-reaching views could never produce. Lost, as it were, in the infinite ocean of mist, I had nothing solid in view but a few yards of the tapering crest, on the one side the brink of the cliffs up which I had climbed, on the other, a few feet off, a precipitous slope breaking away into the southern corries. The darkness would have been like death, but that it was alive with sound, the fugues and harmonies of a thousand burns and waterfalls, pulsing up from the unseen world below.

Turning east again at Stob Dearg, I scrambled along the ridge, skirting many a black gully, to the Dalmally peak (3,689 feet), which is topped by a cairn marking the highest point of Cruachan. Thence I continued along the ridge for about a mile, trying to determine where was the right place for beginning the descent into Coire Cruachan, the big hollow towards Loch Awe. Oft-times a ruined cliff or pile of boulders would start up in front and force me to seek a way round. In clear weather, of course, such obstacles would present no difficulty; to-day it was by no means easy to keep one's bearings. Only once was there a partial uplifting of the grey curtain, and it gave a peep into the savage depths of Glen Noe. The shimmer of white streams foaming down to the glen was more like gleaming lines traced on the fabric of the mist than anything real.

Several high ridges branch off from the main back-

bone of Cruachan; down the angle formed by one of these goes the route into Coire Cruachan. I found what I took to be this important angle, and slid down a long scree-shoot into a corrie, which, as I rapidly descended, opened out into a glen. Presently the clouds were left behind, and the glen revealed itself in all its dreary length. It was much farther than I had expected to the loch, gleaming far away at the end. Down the middle ran a furious torrent, which was joined by numerous tributaries from the mountain-side, many of them formidable to cross with such a spate coming down. The incessant bogs made the going very heavy. About a mile from the loch, the river plunged in three magnificent bounds over rocky ledges into a ravine, and hard by this spot a beaten track offered its welcome aid.

At last the loch was close at hand, but where on earth was the railway? The Oban road, too, was nowhere to be seen. What had happened? There was the lake, and here was the mountain; what other way could there possibly be for rail or road? It took me some time to convict myself of the egregious blunder I had committed; but the fact was patent—I had come down on the wrong side of the central ridge, and ever increasing the initial error had reached the shore of Loch Etive again instead of Loch Awe. Sixteen miles were between me and Dalmally, where my friends and dry clothes were waiting, unless, that is, I preferred an arduous short cut back across the

mountain. But, when I was sufficiently recovered from the shock to think, I suddenly called to mind that a late train ran this very evening from Oban to Dalmally, which there was a faint possibility of catching at Taynuilt. With a desperate spurt, I got across the rough country between, was ferried over the Awe, caught the train, and arrived at Dalmally not much more than four hours late, and in time to save my two friends a sleepless night. I have heard since that the same mistake, or one almost identical, has been made more than once by parties coming off Ben Cruachan, which, like Great Gable, is a puzzling piece of topography in bad weather.

It was rather startling after this rude experience to be invited to climb Ben Cruachan for the second time next day; but my comrades were eager, and after all I had seen very little of the mountain and nothing of its celebrated view. It happened to be the first fine day we had had. When we looked out before breakfast, only a few wisps of cloud were curling round the foreheads of the highest hills, and Ben Cruachan's three eastern spurs, which project like three lofty promontories towards the Strath of Orchy, were clear from top to bottom, their crest of naked granite glittering in the sun. This was too good to be resisted; and so at the end of an hour we had crossed the strip of moorland at the foot, and were fairly engaged on what is the most tedious part of the climber's business, plodding up steep slopes, thick with coarse grass and

deep, stubborn bracken. The sun was hot, and the landscape behind soon had surpassing claims on our attention. Puffed and perspiring, we flung ourselves down among the cool fronds, at intervals that grew disgracefully brief, and watched the prospect widening beyond the hills that ring the strath, saw Ben Lui¹ grow vaster, and Ben More tower aloft with his stalwart mate Stobinian; and then, as we mounted, more distant giants push their heads above the horizon; until the eye ranged over all the heights from neighbouring Ben Eunaich to Ben Lawers over Loch Tay, and from bulky Ben Lawers to Ben Lomond and the Cobbler far away south.

Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement!
Still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
If quickly you turn
And, before they escape you surprise them.

The disadvantage of climbing an open shoulder is the absence of water, which on the contrary is such an advantage in descending. Our first instinct on getting among the crags was to find a spring; but there was nothing better at this height than unaerated pools of brackish water in the hollows of the rocks; and, in fact, we carried our thirst unquenched to the

¹ Beinn Laoigh. When there is an Anglicised form, it has been adopted throughout this book, in preference to the Gaelic names given on the Ordnance maps. The pronunciation is approximately the same for either spelling.

other end of the mountain. Just as we struck the top of the ridge, we had a glimpse over the shoulder into the grim recesses of Glen Noe, which is parted from the glen on this side by a narrow saddle. Then, in a moment, a circling column of mist boiled up from the deeps, like the exhalation from some gigantic crater, coiling among the crags, and for the present extinguishing the northern prospect. A mile and a half ahead, the principal summit emerged into sight now and again, as the scud blew across the main ridge with a keen north-easter behind. Beautiful and bewildering were the wraith-like forms begotten of the mist, and exquisitely fantastic the swift combinations of peak, precipice, and steep, slanting ridge, their foundations lost in the shifting vapours. Now through a sudden rent there shone up from far below, ravishing the eye with pure brilliance of colour, a calm blue lake, winding river-like between woods and bare hills; then, turning by chance, we beheld another great lake, its very counterpart in sinuous length and living blue, and, so quick was the apparition, if we had been asked which was Loch Etive and which Loch Awe, we should have had to clear our brains of mist before we could have answered.

Our route along the ridge was clear enough, now traversing a peak, and now dropping to a col. The corries on either hand echoed with the noise of streams and tantalised our ears. At the base of a craggy slope on the north a tarn gleamed through sunlit haze

like a flake of azure from overhead. Every few instants, for a guide in front, a gap in the flying clouds revealed the massive pyramids of the two main summits, almost alined with each other, and seeming loftier and grander in the transfiguring play of light and shadow. Never had we taken so much delight in the freaks of that impish enemy of ours, the mist.

Scrambling round the front of the higher peak, we entered the natural redoubt that crowns it, frowning over Coire Chat. Whilst we sat there, the freshening gale began to disperse the mists that had concealed full half the scenery. First, through what seemed a hole in the sky, we had a glimpse of sunlit Loch Linnhe and its romantic shores, far, far away; and scarcely had this enchanting vision faded before there came a general shifting of the congregated masses, till at length the northern prospect was all but clear. The guide-books will tell you the names of the innumerable peaks and ranges marshalled before us; it was a weariness to try to identify a tithe of them. More impressive than towering heights was the mighty chasm of Glen Etive, opening right under the corner of our mountain, and cutting deep into the heart of the land, between gloomy files of Stobs, Mealls, Carns, and Bens. Beyond the glen, stretched into the west a black sierra of jagged tops, the battlements of Glencoe's lofty ramparts; Ben Nevis reared a dome-like mass behind; and, far away north, the

Coolin were pencilled on the haze in a line of faint spires and dentellated ridges.

Just as we had crossed the dip between the main summits, the one signal event of the day came to pass: we had an interview with that renowned but unobtrusive phantom, the spectre of the Brocken, or rather his Scottish representative. Standing on the brink of the Cat Corrie, we were admiring the elfish play of the mist as it boiled up from that great cauldron, when, at an apparent distance of twenty paces, a man's shadow was suddenly thrown on the cloud screen, encircled with an iridescent glory. Only one shadow was visible to each of the party, his own image, with his own head as centre to the halo, and each figure was very little bigger than life. For a few seconds the lines of the spectre deepened in intensity, then faded, then returned again. Finally, after a flicker or two, the unsubstantial pageant faded as the last cloudlets dispersed.

This was our formal leaye-taking of Ben Cruachan. The rest of that holiday was spent in parts only too well known to the tourist, and it was some years before I came back to the wild mountainous tract between Ben Cruachan and Ben Nevis. But this second visit was eventful, for I had the good luck to take part in the first ascent of what is often rated as the finest rock-climb north of the English Lakes. This is on the magnificent face of Stob Dearg, highest peak of the loftier of the two Buchailles or Shepherds of

Etive. Stob Dearg stands at the north-east corner of the highest group in Argyllshire, of which the crowning summit is Bidean nam Bian, and looks out across the Moor of Rannoch. To right and left are the entrances to two passes, on the south-east Glen Etive and on the north Glencoe.

Buchaille Etive's furrowed visage
To Schihallion looked sublime,
O'er a wide and wasted desert,
Old and unreclaimed as time.

Seen from the front, Stob Dearg is shaped like a towering cone sliced away at a sharp angle from base to apex. But the slicing was done with a jagged instrument, and the sheer cliffs are gashed by deep rifts and gullies, between which the buttresses break into slender arêtes and soaring rock-towers, offering an inexhaustible variety of routes, possible or impossible, to the cragsman. To the Scottish Mountaineering Club this swaggering north-east face was pointedly a defiance; but it was looked upon as unconquerable until, in 1894, an enterprising member, Dr Collie, tamed its ferocity by making a way to the summit up the ill-defined ridges to the south of the central buttress. In the next few years a good many other climbs were discovered, and by now the whole of the north-east face has been mapped out in main and minor routes and variations. But the direct ascent of the Crowberry Ridge, which is the most striking object in a front view of the mountain, remains the

best among all these climbs. The upper part was vanquished as long ago as August, 1896, and pronounced to be a climb of the highest merit. The first complete ascent was on May 24th, 1900, when our party was led by Mr G. D. Abraham. But it took more than a day to capture a climb like that; in fact, with bad weather and other accidents, the siege lasted nearly a week.

The first two men on the ground had the privilege, such as it was, of taking down the news of Mafeking to this corner of the Highlands. Our engine flew the union jack all the way up from Glasgow; and, at Bridge of Orchy, inspired by memories of De Quincey's "Taking down the news of victory," we mounted a pair of ice-axes in front of the wagonette, and drove the thirteen miles to Kingshouse with a handkerchief of ample breadth and sanguinary dye flying from this flagstaff. But we raised not a ripple on the placid surface of Loch Tulla, and the fringes of Rannoch Moor remained unexcited, for there were no spectators.

Yea! a desert wide and wasted,
Washed by rain-floods to the bones;
League on league of heather blasted,
Storm-gashed moss, grey boulder-stones;

And along these dreary levels,
As by some stern destiny placed,
Yon sad lochs of black moss water
Grimly gleaming on the waste.

But, though there were no human inhabitants, the moor was not so unutterably desolate as Principal Shairp depicts it. Flocks of waterfowl made every patch of water alive, and trout were rising even in the reedy pools, half lochan and half marsh, that fringe the roadside. The road in those days was dreadful. We nearly had a bad spill, and were not surprised much when the rest of the party did not arrive till after dark, having come to grief near Inveroran and been obliged to get a new machine.

Kingshouse Inn, which readers of Neil Munro may remember as the scene of a dramatic episode in "*John Splendid*," is one of the oldest, loneliest, and most primitive of highland hostelries. Buchaille Etive, two miles away, seems to tower over the roof; and the loftier Clachlet, twice as far off in the Black Mount Forest, has a similar look of morose neighbourliness. From the front door, the austere Moor of Rannoch stretches away into blank space; Ballachulish, the nearest village, lies sixteen miles off through the mountains; and you are much more likely to meet a herd of red deer than a human being, if you wander far from the inn door.

On the second day, all five of the party having arrived, we set out in spite of threatening weather to explore our mountain and locate the various climbs, first and chief, of course, the redoubtable Crowberry Ridge. It was the fame of this, more than anything else, that had brought us here, and we were still to

learn that the climb had never yet been done in its entirety by the direct route. We were, in truth, very much in the dark; first as to which was the climb, among the many soaring ridges thrown into relief by the snow-patched gullies and the insinuating coils of mist on the long range of precipices; and then as to the actual routes followed by earlier explorers. And we were some time yet coming to close quarters with our antagonist. A smart shower drove us under the eaves of the bothy on the Glencoe road, and here we made the acquaintance of a fine old pedlar, who gave us a lecture on the virtues of dram-drinking. He was his own text, and an eloquent testimony to his creed, for he could stand all weathers and any amount of fatigue, whilst it appeared that his chief and almost only aliment was whisky. We had recognised him instantly as a humorist by the immense gravity with which he informed us that it was raining.

The rain stopped, and away we went over the river and up the boggy slopes towards our goal. We had marked down tentatively as our finger-post a conspicuous scar on the mountain-side, formed by a sloping slab, nearly a hundred feet long and some sixty wide, with the drainage from a snow-gully crossing it in a water-slide and making a shower-bath below. After a brief halt and a drink below the water-slide, we pushed on up the steepening hill, and were soon among the broken rocks, short scree-slopes, and rough water-courses, below the crags. Overhead, Stob Dearg

was clearing itself of mist, the ridges were towering forward in all their individuality; and we began to feel confident that the big one directly above us, its projections and salient cliffs assuming the form of separate pinnacles, must be the object of our quest. Nor were we in error. Looking across from Kingshouse, you will notice a broad and massive buttress supporting the right side of the peak, with a deep gully bounding it on the right, and another, steeper and narrower, to the left. This is the great north-east buttress. South-west of the narrower gully, the Crowberry Ridge springs from a point eleven hundred and odd feet below to a projecting tower almost within a stone's throw of the peak. On each side it presents sheer and lofty walls towards the demarcating gullies, and it has a very steep, straight-cut nose. We passed the lowest snow not far above the big slab; it consisted of large blocks that had apparently rolled down from above. Two higher patches, enclosing a sharp angle, we had observed as we crossed the moor, the angle being the snout of our ridge. After a spell of rough scrambling we reached the lower of these snow-patches, which we found to be several hundred feet long, filling a gully. Thence we took to the rocks.

But as this was a day mainly given to reconnoitring, there is no need to linger over it. Eventually, we reached a shelf in the middle of the great terminal cliff, with a smooth face going up like a wall in front,

and no weak spot either to left or to right that invited attack. The shelf was formed by the top edge of a big vertical flake, and sure anchorage was obtainable by slipping down behind the flake and wedging oneself, whilst the leader went out on the face to explore. He disappeared round the bulging rocks, and for some time the slow movement of the rope and the scratching of his hobnails on the gritty porphyry kept us alive to the fact that a difficult piece of work was in hand. It felt pretty cold sitting there on the wet rocks with barely room to moye a limb; and it was a relief when our captain returned, though he reported that the rocks immediately above were too bad in their present condition, and that an easier-looking block farther round was insecure. The second man had a try with the same result; and we had to retire into the gully and go round the difficult piece, which was then examined by means of a rope from above it. We ultimately made out that previous climbers had all given the true end of the ridge a wide berth, making their way up the gully at the side to where the abruptness eases off. As one of them had written, "At its lower end also, the rocks which formed the crest of the ridge are hopelessly steep, and nearly unbroken for some 300 feet. . . . I will not prophesy that that cliff will never be scaled in a direct line, but before then I think mountaineering science will have to advance to a higher stage of development. It is conceivable that a line might be chosen up those

rocks any part of which could be climbed if it were, say, on a boulder, or even if there were a reasonable number of platforms or anchorages. But, in the absence of these, a continuous steep climb of 300 feet is generally regarded as impossible, because it would make too great demands on nerve and muscular endurance." Such was the expert opinion of the route which we hoped to prove possible.

Next day we were awake betimes, but rain was falling, and for three long days the weather remained too bad for serious climbing. Stob Dearg was continuously swathed in mist; and the gullies, as we could see afar off by the tracks of white, were spouting water amain. Whilst this lasted, we devoted our time to inventing amusements, indoors when it was pouring, but outside between the showers. The old walls of the inn and the outhouses did not provide much in the way of practice scrambles, and we searched the neighbourhood in vain for accommodating boulders. At one stage, we were reduced to playing tipcat. But when somebody unearthed two fishing-rods, we turned our attention to the river and the little home loch. It was too early and too cold for the fly; we whipped the waters thoroughly and got hardly a rise. But one of the party, who was no member of the angling fraternity, had meanwhile instinctively recognised the absurdity of flinging feathers and fur to creatures that live on fresh meat, and had got the gillie to collect a tiful of worms. Artlessly impaling

one of these on top of a highland trout-fly, he dangled his line as artlessly over the crown of the bridge, dropping it on the surface and bobbing it up and down. It may have been at the second bob, it may have been at the third, but in a very few minutes our beginner startled us by swinging a good half-pounder over the parapet, quite unconscious of the ceremonial uses of a landing-net. He stated that the fish, just as he expected, had jumped out of the water and seized the bait, and had hooked itself forthwith. To tell him that his method of worming was all wrong would have been absurd in these circumstances; and, as he proceeded by luck or accident to catch more fish whilst the fly remained unavailing, we followed his ignoble example.

Sport of another kind was furnished by the semi-artificial lochan near the inn, though we upset the peace of mind of the trout inhabiting its quiet waters. This innocent-looking but treacherous sheet of water possessed various submerged rocks, reed-beds, marshy shores, and a boat. By marking out a devious course among the obstacles, and subjecting each competitor to arbitrary conditions, such as making him sit on a stile, with the boat drawn ashore and the oars shipped, we contrived several paddling and sculling matches; often getting pounded among the rocks and reeds, losing sculls, catching innumerable crabs, and, in short, furnishing each other plentifully with the supreme delight of seeing a friend in difficulties. Our

evenings were modelled on the old Easter ritual at Wasdale Head. One of the party had, unfortunately, to leave before the weather lifted. It rained hard soon after he had started to bicycle to Bridge of Orchy, and the general belief was that he would be driven back again before he had gone three miles. But the morning passed, and there was no sign of him; the day wore on, and we were seated at dinner with the lamps lit, fully belieyng he was now safely at Crieff, when, to our astonishment, he appeared. That terrible road had wrecked his machine; he had just missed his train, and had crawled home again, soaked to the skin, and without a thing to change into. Our first duty was to clothe him. One supplied breeches, another a shirt, someone else jacket and stockings, and so on. His appearance, when we had done our best for him, made up in picturesqueness what it lacked in harmony.

At last, one morning at the witching hour of six, Ashley Abraham, pyjama-clad, thundered into my room, tore me from my bed, and in trumpet tones summoned the staff of the hotel to awake and get breakfast, for behold! it was a fine day. By eight o'clock we were afoot, bound for Stob Dearg, who lorded it over the glen, clear and magnificent, only the topmost pinnacles catching and delaying stray wisps of cirrus. We found the river in spate, but crossed without much wetting where the stream breaks over a sudden outcrop of porphyry. With an

eye on our beacon, the slab, we plodded across the sodden peat-moss, and were soon sweating up the heathery slopes beneath the climb. Yestermorn, there had been a fresh fall of snow on the tops, but the rain had played havoc with the old drifts. There was a regular bergschrund between the snow and the rocks; and in the gully next to our ridge a crevasse, narrow above but wide at the bottom, and some sixteen feet deep, sundered the upper from the lower slope, and was not crossed without trouble.

We had marked the spot where real climbing begins, nearly a hundred feet above the extremity of the ridge, with a stone man. Thence the ascent is first by an indefinite sort of crack, where the rocks are much broken; then comes an exceedingly steep eighty feet, presenting no actual difficulty, ending at the shelf where we had made our reconnaissance the other day. Here the hardest part of the climb begins, about seventy feet of open face, nearly vertical, and almost destitute of good holds, the few that exist being shallow and sloping the wrong way, so that to stick to the rock at all calls for a sustained effort in balancing. It is a place that makes equal demands on a leader's caution and audacity.

At this point there was a general unroping, for the usual forty feet between each pair of men was quite inadequate for the great pitch. George Abraham led up in brilliant style. Anxiously we watched him quit the platform, stepping out upon a tiny ledge with his

left toe, and, moving cautiously leftward and gradually up, disappear from our sight. The rope went out by inches, and we waited in dead silence for a shout to say that the distant platform was won. The shout was a long time coming. At length, the eighty-footer was nearly all paid out, and then the welcome cry came from above with a summons to the next man. And now, with a pause for photography, there was another wait, but this time no need for suspense. Next the rope-end was flung down for the camera, and then my own turn came. Just at the beginning of the critical seventy feet, a shallow saucer-hold, breast-high, sloping out and not affording any grip, is the only fulcrum for lifting the body up four and a half feet vertical. Situations no less trying occur repeatedly. The rocks were firm and solid; but all the way up, in fumbling for finger-holds or a toe-scrape, one had a thrilling view straight down of crags and snowy gullies and precipitous slopes, whilst a bulky rucksack pulling backwards almost outweighed the moral encouragement of the rope. Ashley Abraham came last, and pronounced the climb, so far as we had done it, to be at least equal in difficulty to the direct route up the Eagle's Nest Arête on Great Gable.

We had arrived at a sort of Tennis Court Ledge, on which another stone man was duly erected. As usual on a new climb, we found many splinters hanging in dangerous places, and the worst of them we cleared away. One big lump of porphyry, caught in unstable

equipoise on the bevel-end of a ledge, gave rise to a memorable incident. I was held from above by the rope while I gave the rock a final shove that released it. Thirty feet below, a pinnacle stood out from the face, a squarish mass, some twenty-five feet in height and about sixteen in girth. It is discernible in the photo taken near the foot of the climb, but its place knows it no more. George Abraham had inspected the pinnacle on our first attempt to get up, but had found it shaky. We calculated afterwards, very moderately I think, that it would weigh eighty or ninety tons, the same practically as a heavy locomotive and tender. The falling rock hit the top of it. The pinnacle shook in its socket, lurched forward, bowed majestically over, and, almost before we knew what was happening, went hurtling down the cliffs and gullies. It cleared some hundreds of feet at a leap; then, striking a projection, bounded off, leaving an ugly scar behind, and thundered on down the crags, smashing off corners, crashing into the scree in the gullies, and splashing up the snow like water. In a few moments a storm of fragments was flying down the mountain-side, but we could see only the stones that rebounded above the dense cloud of dust. The whole ridge vibrated like a bridge with a heavy express rushing over, and we clung to the rocks with all our nerves tense, wondering if the shock would bring down more pinnacles about our ears.

Ten feet above our resting-place there is a smaller

ledge, and next a shallow corner, followed by more of the open face, at the same steep angle as the big pitch below, and furnished with the scantiest holds. After a few more awkward slabs, we climb over the bridge of the nose, 150 feet or thereabouts of delightful work, which brings us out on a sloping area of broken rocks, tufted with herbage, where previous climbers have marked with a cairn the point at which they came up on to the ridge from the adjoining gully.

Though a long and interesting climb was before us to the summit, all the difficulties had been conquered, and with a light heart we stretched ourselves on this high belvedere to review the morning's work, and watch the tall summits of Mamore Forest and the vast Aonachs tardily divesting themselves of mist. A rainbow flickered between us and the further portal of Glencoe, tingeing the heather with aerial colours. George Abraham thought that the full-length ascent of the Crowberry Ridge might be said to equal the north face of Pillar Rock plus the Eagle's Nest Arête; or, better still, the three arêtes on Great Gable placed end on end.

Starting again after a pleasant halt, we found the ridge growing easier in slope, the rocks more broken up, and an ample choice of holds and even of routes. A splintered cliff, where the sole danger arose from the abundance of loose stones, led over a tottering pinnacle, and on across a narrow neck to the rock-tower in which this glorious ridge terminates. It is

separated from the summit of Stob Dearg by a gap, not unlike the one between Scawfell and the historic pinnacle. A year or two later, from Ben Vrackie, fifty miles away in the eastern Grampians, I was looking west to Glencoe a few minutes before noon, and saw the Crowberry Tower stand out distinctly from the main peak of Stob Dearg. As the shadows moved with the sun, it was merged gradually in the general mass.

We were soon at the cairn. A wide prospect, hitherto eclipsed by our mountain, burst on the eye, a tumultuous throng of mountain shapes, pre-eminent among them Bidean nam Bian's cluster of snowy cones, and under Bidean the yawning abyss of Glencoe. Through a break in the northern rampart of Glencoe we had glanced many a time all day into the heart of

The lofty Lochaber, where, silent upheaving,
Heaving from ocean to sky, and under snow-winds of
September,
Visibly whitening at morn to darken by noon in the shining,
Rise on their mighty foundations the brethren huge of Ben
Nevis.

We enjoyed a long look at this panorama of Scotland's highest hills, with an appropriate foreground in the Buchaille's lesser peaks, dark, craggy stobs, overlooking fields of snow, and the high ridges and stacks of the Clachlet, seeming no distance away, though separated from us by the huge vacuity of Glen Etive. Then we returned to the corrie under the Crowberry Tower, and began sliding down slopes of scree into

the easy gully. Crossing from gully to gully, we found conspicuous traces of the rock-fall of the forenoon ; but were glad to see that our cairns had not been touched. A rough-and-tumble descent brought us back to the great slab, without a single difficulty except in a pair of steep chimneys, where we untied the three rucksacks, with their valuable contents, and passed them down from hand to hand. These rucksacks, in which were a full-plate camera and nine slides with other accessories, had been a substantial addition to our labours. We got back to the inn after twelve hours of absence, pleasantly tired, pleasantly hungry, and conscious of a day's work creditably done.

Whoever has climbed Buchaille Etive thinks of the mountain as having an individuality, one might almost say a personality, different from its fellows. Its matchless form and its station at the head of a mountain host fronting the morn, give one this feeling. It has gazed down on the scene of so many tragic histories, moreover, that one can hardly help looking among the lines on its wrinkled face for some half-legible record of the past. When far away, we may well be haunted by that ideal shape of mountain symmetry and mountain grandeur, and with the poet Shairp—

On winter nights will wonder how
It fares up yonder—whether now
'Mid rain and cloud-drift, those great peaks
Are listening to the night-wind shrieks,
Or, all alone, the blue heavens share
With bright Arcturus and the Bear.

Twenty years slipped away, not before I saw the Glencoe hills again, but before I had another climb there. The next occasion was the Easter meet of the Scottish Mountaineering Club in 1921, when the main body stayed at Ballachulish, but a small party ensconced themselves, nearer the climbing-ground, in the small Clachaig inn beneath the cliffs of Glencoe. Rain and spate prevailed at our arrival, but Good Friday was fair, and we spent it in going up the Pap of Glencoe, and thence to Sgor nam Fiannaidh, the first summit on the abrupt, serrated north wall of the famous pass. But a furious sleet-storm forbade our continuing along the ridge, and we made a hasty descent. Between the snow-squalls and the rain, the next three days were occupied in promiscuous wandering, or in entertaining members of the Ballachulish party who had defied the weather and came down from Bidean nam Bian all battered and bedrenched; and on the fourth Vandeleur and I also made a forlorn attempt on Bidean, but were driven back by a steady snow-storm.

Next day, though snow covered the ground a few hundred feet up, the weather seemed to be clearing, as a sarcastic farewell, we hopefully opined, to the week-enders who were going home. At all events, if we were to do Bidean at all it must be now. So we started hopefully up the burnside to Coire an Lochan, led by two past presidents of the club who were said to possess between them all the knowledge that has been amassed by innumerable climbers since men began to ascend

this magnificent hill. In the corrie, the snow was fairly hard and the rocks were iced. The mist had never lifted; and now it came on to blow hard, with driving sleet, as the four of us kicked or hacked steps up the slope between Stob Coire an Lochan and the main peak, both of them visible to faith but not to sight.

We landed, after a struggle, on the ridge joining the two peaks. Here the wind was so terrific that no one could stand upright; everything depended on the ice-axes, and the frozen snow was almost as hard as pure ice. We reached the cairn. It was fledged with magnificent ice-feathers. But there was only a momentary halt, for in this hurricane the cairn would not have sheltered a whinchat. Dropping a few feet below the ridge for shelter, we held a brief council. At that moment, a slight thinning of the blizzard gave a glimpse, extinguished the next second, of lower slopes and a distant burn. We thought we must be looking down on Fionn Glen, which runs all along the western side of the mountain, under An t-Sron, the far-extending shoulder by which we had originally proposed to descend. No one now, however, had the least desire to face the gale on An t-Sron, or in the corrie by which we had mounted. Fionn Glen was a roundabout way home, but in the present aspect of things its sheltered depths appealed to all irresistibly. Away then we went, cheered by the prospect of an early return.

It must have been near a thousand feet down, after much floundering and slithering in snow-filled gullies.



BIDEAN NAM BIAN

when somebody noticed that the glen into which we were descending ran to the left and not the right. Great in bulk as well as supreme in height among the Argyllshire hills, Bidean covers an enormous space of ground. To find ourselves in a glen running down to Glen Etive meant, in any event, a long and heavy tramp over pathless country, and, possibly, no shelter at the end of the brief, wintry day. But, if this was not Fionn Glen, it must surely be Glen Fhaolain ; and in that case such was the inevitable and distressful prospect before us. Out of it we must get, as soon as might be. Yet the precipitous, snow-covered flank we were on was an ill thing to traverse horizontally ; and our leader decided that we must go on downhill for the present, and strike up to the bealach or col, which lay somewhere in the mist up to our right, only when the ground improved.

Time pressed, if we were to be in before dark ; hence no stop for lunch ; but scraps of meat and jam-sandwich, raisins and sticky bull's-eyes, were extracted by freezing fingers from frozen pockets and crammed into our mouths as we plodded on. It was a long time before the bealach hove in sight, a broad, gale-swept saddle, with the edges of cliffs visible on the right, leading us to fancy for a moment that we had somehow come back to the brink of Glencoe. We found a safe way down at the head ; and, though there was a dreary trudge down the length of it, all the drearier for the torrents of water which had to be crossed at every

hundred yards, pouring down from the gullies and stream-courses of Bidean, shelter and food were no longer in jeopardy.

Next day we were weather-bound again, and the day following we left to catch the morning train from Ballachulish. I was under a covenant with Vandeleur to stay at Ballachulish and climb Ben Vair, or to get out at Dalmally for Ben Eunaich, if the weather by that time appeared good enough for a scramble. It rained all the way from Ballachulish to Taynuilt; but at Dalmally there was improvement enough in the general look of things to be worth the benefit of the doubt. We were, in fact, well rewarded for breaking the journey, although we had only an afternoon in hand. At two-thirty we started from the Dalmally Hotel, which I had not entered till now since our adventure on Ben Cruachan half a lifetime ago. The hills were still deep in mist; there were ten miles to be walked, as well as three thousand feet to be climbed, and if possible descended, before dark. Nothing seemed less to be hoped for than even a moderate degree of visibility, when we left the Oban road and went at a good pace over the moor to the lower slopes. But a thousand, or perhaps fifteen hundred feet up Ben Eunaich, the change began. First stray points and broken lengths of the giant sky-line of Ben Cruachan showed through the opaque curtain, which was in a state of violent agitation. Then we went through that familiar but curious illusion of seeing peaks look-



BEN VAIR, FROM NEAR GLENCOE

ing down at us from the sky, as the mist disintegrated and the summits came out clear though their bases were still enveloped. By the time we reached Ben Eunaich's first peak, we had around us calm blue weather, a sky of fleckless azure overhead, and, as far as the eye could reach, a sea of white cumulus, two thousand feet deep, with all the peaks of Scotland floating like islands on its luminous surface. Alas! where was the camera now? It had been left behind because time was short; our discretion in leaving it could not be gainsaid; but now we would have given pounds for a negative or two of this incomparable view.

On the precipice side of the higher peak a big snow-cornice stuck out, and we stood on this as near the edge as we dared. The shadow of the peak was clearly outlined on the volumes of mist surging up from the corrie; and now our shadows appeared standing up from the peak. A glory of the most intense effulgence encircled the phantom, and burned steadily, for the screen was dense and unbroken. We took observations at leisure, and found that, if we stood near enough together for our shadows to blend, two heads were distinguishable; if we stood apart, as in the case witnessed years before on Ben Cruachan, each man saw only his own figure. We spent an hour at the peak; it was worth being late for dinner. Vandeleur is a geographer, with a head like a guide-book for major and minor heights. Between us, few of the vast multitude visible, from Ben Screel in Ross-shire

to Ben Lomond and the Arran peaks in the south, escaped identification. We might live to be a hundred and never see such a view again. At last we dragged ourselves away, and went down the mountain in the dusk; and, when the sun had gone completely, an Alpine afterglow flushed Ben More and Ben Lui a wondrous and ineffable rose-pink.



A SPRING SNOW-FIELD IN THE CAIRNGORMS

III

IN THE CAIRNGORMS

All night enfolded in the lap of Bens,
 Around our sleep the loud and lulling sound
Of many waters meeting from the glens
 Made lullaby profound.

—SHAIRP.

HOLIDAYS in the Cairngorm mountains are always associated in my mind with recollections of nights spent in the open. Though, as already hinted, there is a wider region of mountainous country, destitute of roads or acknowledged rights of way and of any place of entertainment, north of Ben Wyvis and the road from Dingwall to Ullapool, Geikie's description, "the widest area of the wildest scenery," is correct, if we insist on the two superlatives. In the midst of this savage area rise the highest summits in Britain, after Ben Nevis; and they are but the culminating points of by far the largest mass of ground that attains the altitude of 4,000 feet above the sea. Some sixty tops in the central group, and many more on the outskirts, rise more than 3,000 feet above sea-level. Deer forests cover and environ the whole region; but there are undisputed rights of way to the two principal sum-

mits, Ben Muich Dhui and Cairngorm. Ascents of the others are comparatively rare, not only because of artificial difficulties, but on account of their remoteness from any hospitable base. Even the few high passes that go through the heart of the range are exceedingly rough and exceedingly long from one halting-place to the next; they have a bad reputation for storms and mists, and there are records from time immemorial of grave mishaps to travellers, some of them fatal.

When, therefore, in the days of my mountaineering novitiate, a friend whose boyhood and youth had been spent at the foot of Cairngorm asked me to join him in a dash up Glen Tilt and across to Rothiemurchus, I agreed with alacrity. Nothing in such a region is more useful than a guide, not only familiar with the topography, but well-versed also in the arts of converting hard-grained foresters to charitable views on access to mountains and eliciting the hospitality of their wives. We started from Blair Atholl one morning, in what my friend's diary described as "golden weather." The Tilt was low and pellucid; the hills between which it runs on and on, as straight almost as a railway cutting, were dwarfed and tamed by the brilliant sunshine, which abbreviated even the mileage, at least to the eye. My introduction to this land of adventure could hardly have been made under more genial auspices. At a cottage¹ below the Forest Lodge, one of

¹ The cottage referred to is known as the Marble Lodge, being built of Glen Tilt marble.

the Duke's shooting-boxes, I made my first acquaintance with one of that stalwart and worthy clan, the highland foresters, whose good graces it is well to cultivate if you would roam at ease in the eastern Grampians. It was early in the summer, and neither duty nor inclination prompted him to be anything but cordial to the traveller up that lonely glen. My companion professed some knowledge of the Gaelic. I was sceptical, and suggested that he should say "good morning" to a youngster whom we met near here. The young Celt stared in alarm, and took to his heels, after which we did not pursue the subject.

Not another person did we catch sight of till we had walked the whole length of Glen Tilt, and were crossing the boggy tract at the watershed where the first glimpse of the Cairngorms bursts upon the eye with visionary suddenness. We were tired, after a long, hot day. Just as we saw, far, far away, two solitary houses on the skirts of the hills, tiny specks on the mountainous landscape, we caught sight also of two figures a mile ahead, hastening in the same direction. Were they bound on the same errand as we, to secure a bed at one of the two cottages, the only available bed, in truth, that my companion knew of for many a long mile? The bare idea made us hurry; but we did not catch them up, or even see where they disappeared. There were no guests in possession, however, when we reached the forester's abode, and

we were made very comfortable, if we did have to sleep in one bed, and that in a hole in the wall.

The Cairngormer had been talking all day, off and on, about a night he had once spent at the Shelter Stone by Loch Avon, high up between Ben Muich Dhui and Cairngorm; and we now decided to stay there the following night, as it would enable us to do more of the peaks than if we crossed to the other side in one day. Our hostess next morning supplied a miscellaneous assortment of edibles: oatcake, scones, bacon, salt fish, and the like, most of which we tied up in a brown-paper parcel and attached to my knapsack. After a dip in the Geldie burn, we set off early, but lost some time through attempting a short cut to the Dee, a mile or two above the bridge. My long-legged friend was a dab at fording rivers; but even he nearly came to grief, and I was lucky to get off with nothing worse than a wetting. The Dee comes down from the Larig Ghru, the better-known of the two deep passes that cut straight through the central Cairngorms. Below where we forded it, the river turns away, almost at right angles, towards the Linn of Dee and Braemar. The warders of the pass are huge hills that anywhere else in Scotland would rank as mountains; here they are but foot-hills to the crowning summits, Cairn Toul, Braeriach, and Ben Muich Dhui, miles away behind. But the object that catches the eye more than the towering wedges and plateaux far above is Cairn Toul's pike-shaped buttress, the Devil's Point. Only 3,303

feet high—not much higher than Scafell—and backed by elevations nearly a thousand feet higher, it sentinels imposingly the entrance to Glen Geusachan, a gloomy hollow winding in behind Cairn Toul. Its precipitous face is plated with long granite slabs, bolted over each other like the armour of some invincible monster, giving it a dragonish look worthy of its name.

The Larig is a long and monotonous trudge, and we were glad to strike off beyond the Allt Clach nan Taillear, the Stream of the Stone of the Tailors,¹ up the steep shoulder of Ben Muich Dhui. When we left the heather, we had before us near two thousand feet of piled-up rocks, neither scree nor precipice, but ruined face of cliff. It was hot, and this route is one of the driest. Snow gleamed all around, in the channel of the burn, and in every cleft and gully of the Garbh Coire, the enormous recess opening out on the other side of the pass, embraced by the loftiest of the western Cairngorms. A parching thirst was exasperated by the sight of coolness and moisture a mere stone's throw away, but practically out of reach. About half-way up, the grandest view of the pass is obtained, one which later visits have made very familiar though they have not wiped out that earliest impression. Across the depths between, the supreme heights of Cairn Toul and Braeriach spring from a vast system of precipices,

¹ This Stone of the Tailors, or rather the three megaliths that bear the name, commemorate the legend of three Rothiemurchus tailors who, for a wager, set off to dance at three dances in three far-sundered villages, and perished somewhere here.

the curving upper wall of the Garbh Coire, hugest and ruggedest of all highland corries, its bottom a bewildering waste of stones, dropping in confused tiers to the Larig. So intense was the visibility that every rock in that infinite wilderness of great rocks and little rocks stood out distinct, and the multitudinous ridges and pinnacles on the miles of cliff seemed to fall into order, like the complexity of traceries and flying-buttresses in a vast cathedral. Down through the chaos of rocks, the course of the infant Dee was marked from the point where it falls over the highest cliff, by unmelted snow-drifts and the sparkle of waterfalls. But the most compelling object in the whole view, wonderful in its union of grace and sublimity, is the cup-shaped hollow caught up, as it were, between the locked arms of Cairn Toul and the Angel's Peak. In this lofty basin lies an exquisite blue-green tarn, fount of a torrent that drops from the lip in a thin white thread to the tangle of rocks below. Lighted as it was that day, it all made a stupendous scene; and in between, the wide abyss of the Larig Ghru was like the auditorium of a stupendous theatre, humming with the noise of waters, as if with the murmuring of an infinite multitude.

We reached the cairn on Ben Muich Dhui (4,296 feet) in an hour and a half from leaving the pass. Our view now expanded west and north-east to the sea. It is a strange environment to anyone used to the scenery of the western Highlands. Here there are no sharp peaks, slender arêtes, and contorted ridges. The



CAIRN TOUL AND LOCHAN UAIN FROM BEN MUCH DHU

chief impression is, not of towering heights, but of unfathomable depths. For a mountain, the top of Ben Muich Dhui is strangely level. Behind is the mighty chasm of the Larig; near at hand, cliffs plunge down to the southern and eastern corries; and, a mile or so further away, a deep gulf yawns between Cairngorm and the great eastern neighbour of Ben Muich Dhui, at the bottom of which, but as yet too far down to be in sight, reposes Loch Avon. Around us stretched an undulating surface of grit and stones, bare of herbage, except where big green cushions of moss-campion, starred with vivid pink florets, relieved the arid expanse. There is a spring not far from the cairn, where we lost no time in slaking our thirst. Then, still devouring the view, we made for the descent to Loch Avon, skirting the brow above Loch Etchachan, the highest loch of any great size in Scotland, and frozen over half the year, where a friend told me later on that he had caught trout of good weight at a level 3,100 feet above the sea.

We followed the Garbh Uisge or Rough Burn, and soon found ourselves descending towards huge broken edges of cliff, beyond which is a void. But the Garbh Uisge takes a milder course, and presently, joined by another burn, runs down, in fall after fall, through a hollow amidst the cliffs, between the perpendicular walls of which we now perceived Loch Avon, far below in a narrow glen hemmed in by crags. Nothing could surpass the mingling of weird loveliness and awe-

inspiring savagery which Loch Avon presents, lying there in its rock-bound fastness asleep beneath a mid-summer sky. The way down was not obvious. We stuck close to the burn, which had now become a boisterous torrent, tunnelling through deep beds of snow, and shooting over the rocks in dazzling spray, the very ideal of an iced shower-bath. We dropped beside it from rock to rock, and found the descent quite easy, and very different from the blood-curdling description to be read in an almost forgotten romance, "The Wolfe of Banenoch," by the famous antiquary of Speyside, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, who brings his hero down to the Shelter Stone on his war-horse, man and beast clad in complete mail. Even a good cragsman would rather be excused from partaking in such an escapade; for, though the descent is easy, there is no room for fancy horsemanship. My comrade, self-absorbed, was leaving me to my own devices—divers purple patches in his journal, and a sonnet to boot, were the probable explanation—and allowed me to hug the stream too closely. This nearly proved fatal to our provisions, as I had a slip at the spot where the granite slabs suddenly end, and, though I recovered myself, the brown-paper parcel burst, and sent the contents rolling far and wide. We contrived to gather up everything almost undamaged, and continued our way more sedately. An ungrateful entry in the journal stated that "Baker was more delighted at saving the grub than at his own escape."



THE SHELTER STONE.

It is not easy to pick out the Shelter Stone among the heaps of colossal debris as one comes down towards the loch, though its dimensions might lead one to expect differently, since it measures forty-four feet in length and is estimated to weigh 1,700 tons. But big stones are common hereabouts; in truth, one gazes with something of a tremor at the scarred and fissured face of the cliff overhead, wondering how many more shelter stones are waiting to keep this company. Certain curious lichen-markings on the façade are, however, a conspicuous guide to the stone when you know them, and a well-trod path leads up from the water-side to its front door. The famous stone is really a large rock that has tumbled across some lesser ones, forming a sort of cavern, with a narrow doorway but a roomy interior, the walls and roof of which are almost as smooth as dressed ashlar. The passage wall has been continued artificially inside to form the head of the bedstead. There is no spring mattress, but the dry heather spread about abundantly is not a bad substitute to weary limbs. Most of the natural gaps in the walls of the structure have been built up by former lodgers with small stones, turf, and heather; not, however, to such an extent as to deprive the interior of ventilation, as we were to prove by experience.

Our first business was to prepare a meal. Being unprovided with any sort of cooking-pan, we hunted up the best specimens of old meat tins and biscuit

canisters that lay on what might be termed the kitchen-midden, and after scouring them with gravel in the stream hard by, so thoroughly that some were ground into holes, we produced two serviceable utensils, and at once set about cooking dinner. The tea, of course, was a wee bit smoky, and traces of bacon fat floated on the surface; but tea never evoked more satisfaction; and the rest of our Scottish fare was none the worse for the tumble down the rocks.

Cairngorm had still to be done, for we meant to get up early next morning, and climb Braeriach and Cairn Toul before descending to Speyside. But, despite the perfect morning, a heavy shower delayed us, and it was actually seyen o'clock in the evening when we set out to climb the 1,700 feet between us and the summit of the eponymous peak. A gully comes down on the north side of Loch Avon between two high crags, one of which is now well known as the Stag Rock.¹ Although a recent landslip or a heavy storm had covered the slopes below with rubbish, so that loose stones were far too plentiful, it seemed to offer little difficulty, and was certainly the most direct way up. Three hundred feet from the top, we were clear of the loose stones, but found ourselves involved in other difficulties. The gully had steepened, but was not a clean rock gully; and the loose earth and dense,

¹ It was so christened originally by my esteemed friend Mr Alexander Inkson M'Connochie, formerly editor of the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, to whom, as an unrivalled authority on the district and on many other parts of the Highlands, I am deeply indebted for information and valuable advice.

spongy mosses, with a rillet trickling through them, gave anything but secure foot-hold, and hand-hold on the straight, smooth walls was very scarce. These top pitches cost us a severe struggle. Almost under our feet lay the loch, flushed with the rare tints of a Cornish bay, tracts of sand staining the shallow margin a creamy brown. Our view of the wild hollow in which it lies was cut off at the sides by the walls of our gully. A big stone, dislodged whilst we were contemplating the picture in this harsh frame, bounded away for hundreds of feet, carrying a small avalanche of fragments to swell the rubbish-heap below. My comrade was the first out of this objectionable place, but discovered that he had dropped some things out of his pocket in his wrestle with the awkwardest pitch. He preferred, however, losing his property to risking himself in such a situation again; so, to save the honour of the party, I had to scramble down and fetch his belongings.

The climb so far had taken an hour, and we decided to turn back at eight-fifteen, whatever our position. But eight-thirty found us still spell-bound on Cairngorm's lonely summit. The object that fascinated us most in the vast and solemn landscape, on which the shadows were deepening fast, was the broad and shining mirror of Loch Morlich, right at the foot of Cairngorm. Does the old Celtic myth of the Land of Heart's Desire, the immortal paradise hid beneath the waves of

some inland sea, originate in the familiar sight of such a lake as this, whose tranquil surface, so pure and still as to be invisible, seems as it were a window opening into a diviner region under the earth? Such was the impression made on our minds by this beautiful lake, with its luminous reflected world, begirt with dusky leagues of forest, on which night had already descended.

A sprinkle of rain fell, cutting short our meditations. We turned and ran down the stony sides into Coire Raibert, away to the left of the Stag Rock and its detestable gully. Every landmark was obliterated, for a heavy shower had made night more aggressive; but somehow we found our way to a stream which we rightly guessed would lead us down again to Loch Avon. And so, jumping, sliding, stumbling down the rugged slope, we reached the shore, and almost groped our way beside it homeward; and not a bit too soon. Our retreat and all its surroundings looked dismal in the extreme. The fireplace was drenched, and the fire had to be built again right in the doorway, at the cost of filling our apartment with smoke. But a cup of hot coffee and the last of the whisky put us to rights before we turned in; then we stuffed our knapsacks with juniper, and sternly composed ourselves to rest. Sleep was a long time in coming. It was not the silence that troubled us, for silence there was none, but only the monotone of streams pouring down into the great

cirque where we lay, varied at times by sounds that might be the cry of a ptarmigan or the bark of a prowling fox. It was the chilliness that kept us awake. Our clothes were not half dried, and we had nothing to change into. We made a quilt of everything we could lay hands on, including the empty knapsacks and the brown paper, of which we regretted we had not got more, and at length oblivion descended.

There was not much lying abed in the morning. When we looked out of our cave, a dense mist overlay everything about a hundred feet overhead. The loch was clear from end to end; but we knew what to expect on the higher levels. As we breakfasted on the last of the provisions, we decided, without discussion, to give up Cairn Toul and Braeriach, and to make the best of our way straight to Rothiemurchus. We ascended beside the burn that tumbles precipitously into the Garbh Uisge, reached the broad, humpy plateau between Cairngorm and Ben Muich Dhui, and made as direct a line as we could across it, traversing many stretches of old snow. Our object was to reach the gentle slopes to the north-north-west where we might drop easily to the Larig, just before it descends between outlying spurs to Rothiemurchus Forest. Somehow, we bore too much to the left, for all of a sudden we found ourselves on the brink of a precipice, close to a fine pinnacle, which we identified at a later date as the

summit of Creag na Leacainn or the Lurcher's Rock (3,448 feet). There was no way here for us. We bent our steps first south, my comrade's knowledge only sufficing to warn us that we were on the edge of the Larig, somewhere near its deepest. Then we returned north, keeping clear of the lines of crag which hinted at dangerous cliffs below; and, after much wandering and blundering, we found ourselves moving rapidly downhill.

The merry tinkle of a burn grew louder and louder. Then the mist thinned, our surroundings became visible, and, to our delight, we found an unmistakable track. The Larig, was my instinctive thought; but to my surprise my comrade looked doubtfully at this sign of human existence, and at last said he was sure this was not the Larig. For me to have an opinion on such a question, or at any rate to express one, was of course absurd. So I obsequiously bowed to his local experience when he announced that our best plan was to follow the stream down till we came to something of a less equivocal nature. In point of fact, it was the Larig, as we were to spend an hour of useless trouble in discovering. It rose over the neck of a little hill, whilst we clambered down to the bottom of the glen, and fought our way through a maze of runnels, bog-holes, and the jungle of matted heather and whortleberry that gradually merges in the under-growth of the forest. All the while it was raining,

and the drenched vegetation sprinkled us copiously at every step. Nor when we regained the track and realised the error we had committed were our tribulations over, for my conductor got mixed in his mind about the first bridges. Where the Larig track comes at length to signs of habitation—relics of the forsaken sheilings of Auldrue—there is a plank bridge across the river. We ought to have shunned this and kept straight on, to where the track crosses the Bennie, the much more formidable stream flowing down from Glen Eunach. But the Cairngormer declared that this was the way, and crossed by the plank bridge. In a few minutes, the other stream appeared, rolling along in angry waves, and without a moment's hesitation he plunged in and forded it, his long shanks making little of the adventure. My performance was not so elegant. But Coylum Bridge was not far off now, and it was not long before we were sitting down to a square meal and getting our things dried. After which, the turf-y, pine-scented glades of Rothiemurchus Forest and the romantic shores of Loch an Eilein, where we saw the ospreys in their still unravished home on the ruined castle, gave the rest and refreshment that was our due.

Such was my first acquaintance with the Cairngorms. A friend at home was so keenly interested in our account of the expedition, of the proceedings at the Shelter Stone in particular, that he came north with me about a year later, bent on finding out by a

night there whether the Stone was really as comfortable as we made out. It was 1897, the year of the Diamond Jubilee, and we had arrived at the conclusion, after carefully examining a map of the Highlands, that the finest point in the three kingdoms for seeing the bonfires was the top of Ben a'Ghlo (3,671 feet). This is the bulky pile walling the south-east side of Glen Tilt, and heaving a shapely cluster of four peaks in the foreground of the view from Ben Vrackie and other well-known points. It commands—or should command if one could but command the weather—a panorama away south to the Ochils and Pentlands, westwards to Ben Nevis, and north to the hills of Ross and Sutherland. Thus we conspired to pass the brief space of a highland night at midsummer on the highest peak, and after the festivities descend the other side to Glen Dee, on our way to the Cairngorms. We made heroic efforts to be on the spot in time, coming from England by a late train, and spending some hours of darkness in trying to sleep on the hard cushions in the ladies' waiting-room at the Waverley station, amid the screaming of locomotives, the clatter of luggage, and the shunting of coaches and trucks. When, in the early morn, our pillows began to feel softer and more conducive to slumber, a scandalised damsel of fifty appeared and swept us out, with other offensive matter, on to the breezy platform. Luckily, the train was soon made up, and we pursued the coy god of dreams with more

success as we were borne across the Forth and over the Fifeshire Lomonds, on our way north. At times we woke to peep out of the window, and our hopes of witnessing an unexampled transformation-scene were exalted by the sight of numerous and imposing pyramids of combustibles crowning the hill-tops, with a watchman performing sentry-go hard by each. But we had overlooked one inauspicious circumstance, the ominous name of our destination, the Mountain of the Mist.

Much against the grain, we quitted our travelling couch at Blair Atholl, the regular starting-point for a journey across the eastern Grampians; and, before leaving the precincts of the railway-station, we seized the opportunity to weigh our rucksacks, with some vague idea of calculating the foot-poundage left in us, as compared with our load and the altitude to be attained. After a little adjustment, we found our burden to be just a stone and a half apiece. I had been so much impressed on former occasions with the difficulty of getting provisions in the remoter Highlands, that we had brought from town a liberal supply of tinned meats, fruit, jam, and other articles, a large part of which had gone on in the train to our next centre. To these necessities my comrade, Hamish Roy (Red James), being new to the mountaineering profession, had indiscreetly added a little arsenal of things that might possibly come in useful. He had no idea of cutting away to the vanishing-point every-

thing that swells the rucksack, which is the fine art of travel and camping-out. His piece of soap was big enough for a hard day's washing; he had yards upon yards of bandages suitable for all sorts of contusions or breakages, a dozen clean handkerchiefs, and so on in proportion. And, somehow, throughout this journey to various parts of the Highlands, we seemed to be always lugging our provisions just to those places where plenty reigned; whilst, if by chance we found ourselves ten miles away from anywhere and desperately hungry, the tommy bag was sure to be empty. Some of those canned dainties actually went back by train as they had come, and we had very little satisfaction for carrying twenty-two pounds on our backs where roads are unknown. On the whole, we regretted our lack of improvidence.

Blair Castle and the territory of the summer tourist were soon well behind us. Few of the crowds who haunt Pitlochry and the soft vale of Garry ever get as far as Carn Liath, the first peak of Ben a' Ghlo; and fewer still venture beyond it towards the highest and most remote peak of all, Carn nan Gabhar, for the very good reason that the guides tell them the other is Ben a' Ghlo. At the upland farm of Monzie we had the temerity to add a few perishable items to the provision bag; and thence bore across the moor to where the mountain slopes suddenly up-curve from the hillocky face of a wide tableland. A buffeting wind at our back helped us up Carn Liath,

the grey cone that peeps down the Pass of Killiecrankie; but we had just finished the hard work, and sat down under the lee of the cairn to survey the situation, when a whiff or two of mist came floating by, and in a few moments, not only the distance, but all save a few rods of the hill on which we sat was blotted out as if by enchantment. There was all day before us, however, and we hastened along the ridge undismayed, looking for a rock or heap of boulders under which to shelter us from the drizzle shaken out of the humid curtains by the gale.

On Ben a' Ghlo there are hardly any escarpments, an unfortunate defect in thick weather, not only on account of the absence of shelter, but also for the complete dearth of interest. Gullies and rocky buttresses are a kind of scenery that can be felt, so to speak, even if the eye cannot see many yards of them. Our ridge was a mere causeway, with slopes on either hand violently steep, sparing us, at all events, any trouble in finding the route. One might grope one's way in the dark along that narrow ridge to the peak with the portentous name, a name that goes very well to Clough's hexameter:—

Something outlandish, Braigh something, Braigh-Choire,
he believed, Chruinn Bhalgain.

Up to this eminence (3,505 feet), which is the central summit of Ben a' Ghlo, there was no difficulty beyond the toil of mounting nine hundred feet more of what one might, in contradistinction to rock-slopes, call

vegetable-slopes. By a cruel irony, we were denied water to drink, although our clothes were getting soaked. But now the trouble was to find Carn nan Gabhar, which lay a mile or so away over yonder in the mist. It was due east, the map said; but on that side a slope fell away at such an angle into some huge hollow, out of which echoes of the burns travelled up from remote depths, that we were loath to believe that we must go down there before scaling 3,688 feet. We rolled stones right down the slope to hear if they hit anything, and their last repercussions sounded very far away. A compass is a valuable instrument, but it will not discover a missing ridge, and we had only the half-inch map, which is sparing of contour-lines.

The upshot was, we followed the ridge before us for a good mile, gently descending, and looking carefully for the neck that bridges the great hollow. We came across a pool of passable water, where we lunched, and at length the mist lifted for a brief interval. Then we perceived, deep on our right, a narrow glen with a violent stream at the bottom, the noise of which had been pealing in our ears for the last hour. Which way did it run? If south, we were right; if north, we had gone beyond the watershed, and were all wrong. A few minutes' anxious observation settled the question to our disadvantage. The glen was the profound trough of the Allt Fheannach, which all but severs Ben a' Ghlo into two

groups of mountains, and, to judge by our actual nearness to the burn, we must have left that elusive ridge a mile higher up in our rear. Facing us rose the front of Carn nan Gabhar, horribly steep; no crags, save a solitary needle sticking up from the angle of two corries; but long slopes of grass and scree that sent our hearts into our boots. Menacing as ever, the mist fumed along the crest; the respite was not long ere it enwrapped us again. Bogs, rank heather, and then the tall bracken on the lower slopes, bedrenched us. To spend a night out under such conditions was obviously an insane idea; and merely to climb Carn nan Gabhar now would be like doing the whole mountain over again. We made our minds up to drop down to Glen Tilt, and seek the nearest shelter of any description.

In Glen Tilt many traces were visible of the flood that had swept the whole of this region the previous winter. The bridge built across the Tarf water, a few yards below the falls, as a memorial to a life lost here in fording the stream, had been submerged, though the footway is high above the water, and the gorge opens wide into Glen Tilt immediately below. The planks covered with shingle told an eloquent tale of the cataract to be seen here when the snows thaw. We had struck the glen so high up that there was no question of retreating in the direction of Blair Atholl; Glen Dee was only three hours away, where we should be a day's march to the good. On we

went, therefore, towards the watershed, through the drenching rain—

Heedless of scenery, heedless of bogs, and of perspiration.

Before we reached the head of the pass, we saw a pair of queer figures approaching, who turned out to be two unhappy cyclists from Braemar. Misled, probably, by a map-maker who had never been here —certain of that wicked crew have laid down a good road in the Larig Ghru itself—they had set out to cycle to Blair Atholl, something like thirty miles, of which the bigger half is rough mountain track, and that broken down in many places by the frolicsome Tilt. After wading through the flooded burns and the bogs at the watershed in their thin shoes, they were certainly entitled to credit for not giving it up in despair. We told them it was only ten miles to the next village, and that they could ride some of it; then we wished them God-speed, with a sinful feeling of comfort at finding somebody in worse plight than ourselves. Pennant came this way from Blair to Braemar in 1769, and described it thus:—"The road is the most dangerous and the most horrible I eyer travelled: a narrow path, so rugged that our horses often were obliged to cross their legs; while, at a considerable and precipitous depth beneath, roared a black torrent, rolling in a bed of rock solid in every part, but where the Tilt had worn its ancient way."

When we reached the point where the first glimpse of the Cairngorms is usually caught, a mass of rain-cloud hid all but the nether buttresses and one high emerging crag of Ben Muich Dhui. We spent Jubilee night at our old quarters in the forester's cottage, with a peat fire as our only illumination. The Cairngorm Club, we were told, had sent representatives to the summits of Cairngorm and Ben Muich Dhui, to carry out an elaborate pyrotechnical programme, which was to signalise their own anniversary and the royal festival at once. They met with the same resistance as we; but we heard afterwards that two Englishmen had succeeded, though strangers to the locality, in finding their way up Ben Muich Dhui, singing the national anthem at the cairn, and retiring in good order.

Next morning the weather was worse than ever, and we began to doubt the wisdom of our courage in pushing on to this hopeless place instead of returning to the neighbourhood of a railway. All the forenoon we watched in vain for any improvement that would justify an attempt to cross by the Larig Ghru; but it would have been madness to venture so far up among the mountains, even had we found the streams fordable. But why not try to outflank the hills by crossing the col between Glen Geldie and Glen Feshie, which runs along the western fringe of the Cairngorms? This plan, which meant some two dozen miles in mere distance, we discussed with the old

forester, who thought it feasible, but remarked that a bridge had been washed away on a tributary of the Feshie some years ago, and he had not heard whether it had been replaced. We thought little of this information at the time, and set off, half an hour after midday, for either Insh or Kingussie, as luck should have it, as gaily as the depressing state of the weather allowed. The country between the two glens is a dreary morass, with a track crossing it—on the map. That document says, indeed, “Glen Geldie path indistinct”; it ought to have said “non-existent.” You might as well look for ocular evidences of a parallel of latitude. For an hour or two we were practically at sea, navigating through rain and fog across a desolate, featureless waste. Glimpses we had from time to time of grisly, snow-furrowed visages glowering at us out of the rushing cloud—the faces of Monadh Mor, Meall Tionail, and other stately vassals of Cairn Toul. At length, tired of wading through bogs and toiling up and down the innumerable fairy-knolls, as the imaginative highlander calls them, between the streams, we came in sight of the Feshie. And, at the same moment, we saw before us the most formidable stretch of quaking bogs, unfathomable moss-hags, and miry pools that we had ever seen. When we got across it without being engulfed, and felt the hard bank of the river under our feet, we fondly hoped that we had put the worst behind us. But the fun had hardly begun.

Anon we came to the Eidart, the huge affluent of the Feshie that drains the western slopes of Cairn Toul; it was in spate, and the track ended abruptly right over a tumbling rapid. Now we called to mind that somebody had said something about a bridge that had been washed away. It was no insignificant burn. The Eidart at the confluence is bigger than the Feshie, and a much more awkward customer to tackle. Were we to be forced, after all, to retrace our steps to Glen Dee? We walked upstream, to see if there was any getting across higher up. The steep staircase of spouting falls, headlong scours, and dark, whirling pools, is something like the falls of Bruar, near Struan, but sterner and grander in the surroundings. In half a mile we came to a big fall. Here the Eidart comes tearing down between imprisoning walls only a few feet apart, and is suddenly hurled over a cliff, with such a plunge that the mass of water shoots out fifteen feet before thundering down into the turmoil below. Tons of flood-water were coming down, making the rocks we stood on quiver. We deliberated whether we could summon up courage to emulate the famous feat of Alan Breck and David Balfour in Glencoe, by leaping this, the narrowest part of the torrent; but, since a slip on the shelving rocks beyond that raging flood would have made a very untidy sort of death unavoidable, we preferred the less tragic ordeal of fording the Feshie, above the junction of the two streams.

By hesitating, we were only putting off the inevitable.

We got across the river with nothing worse than a further wetting, and pushed ahead downstream. But it was not long before we realised that our position on the wrong side of the glen was a hopeless one, for the hills soon close in, and the glen becomes a ravine. There was nothing for it but to cross again below the junction. We chose a spot where the river, more than doubled in volume, spreads itself out wide and tolerably shallow. In we went. It was a long-drawn struggle, and the water very chill. So powerful was the swollen current that our feet were seized, almost at every step, and shoved aside by main force. We moved by inches, holding on to each other, and probing the bottom with our sticks. Where the Feshie would have stranded us if it had once got a grip, we did not stop to think; but, as a climber keeps his eyes heavenward for fear of the chasm behind, we fixed ours on the distant bank, and in due time celebrated our landing with a dram that warmed us right to the toes.

In crossing, we had, of course, to doff our water-proofs, and our saturation was now more than skin-deep. We were a queer picture of discomfort for gods and red deer, standing up by the next streamlet eating our sandwiches in the rain, and feebly sheltering the repast under our mackintoshes. It was Hamish's first taste of real mountain weather; he had not yet

developed the spirit that yearns for obstacles and disasters, for the joy of vanquishing them. But, being a devout man, instead of upbraiding the elements, he relieved himself in outbursts of polite but scathing irony against our absurd method of wasting a valuable holiday, the result being quite as gratifying. "What a birthday we're having!" quoth he from time to time, as the rain came down thicker, or his leg slipped into a bog-hole of unusual depth and softness. "It's wonderful what the human frame can stand," he ejaculated, with respect for his own endurance. But I said nothing in reply, for his face had grown perceptibly thinner since we had come north, and he must have lost some pounds of flesh with the exertion of carrying the redundant pounds of provisions.

Feshie Glen narrows in below the Eidart; firs, alders, and silvery birches wave over the stream; and, for many a long mile, the scene is strangely beautiful, in its own wild way. How many of the mountain vistas that we saw had furnished backgrounds to Landseer's studies of deer and the other inhabitants of this region! He was particularly fond of the country about the Feshie. Shaggy braes rise abruptly on each side above the trees, which are rooted in ledges and niches of the ravine; far below our narrow path the river speeds on between straitened banks, now gliding smooth and strong in semi-darkness, and now breaking into dazzling foam where it leaps a granite barrier. From the peat-moss behind the opposite

cliffs many tall and graceful cascades fall into leafy chasms and are seen no more; others fling themselves right into the black pools of the Feshie. Up the mountains, small parcels of deer show themselves now and again; their heads along the sky-line look like stones and stubbly bushes, unless you watch patiently and see them slink away. Not long ago, heavy floods had devastated the glen; the ravages we saw were worse than anything we had met with in Glen Tilt. Torrents of water, or perhaps heavy snow-slides, had swept down from the back of the Sgoran Dubh, tearing out new channels on the slopes, and scattering acres of scree and boulders among the hoary groups of pine. Many an ancient Scotch fir was buried half-way up the bole, like some half-submerged statue in the desert.

At a place called the Islands, and sometimes the Huts, where the first dwellings appear, the valley widens and the river forks into several branches. This is the loveliest part of the glen. The isles or peninsulas are finely wooded, with meadowy glades intersecting the pines; and beyond the forest girdle rise the bare hills, a mountain wilderness round an oasis. In a grove of firs opposite Feshie Lodge, a chapel-like structure of timber shelters the remains of a hut containing a fresco of deer painted by Landseer. Close by are some inhabited shielings, and a large herd of deer were feeding here as peacefully as kine, so well they know that nobody dare meddle with them

in the neighbourhood of their guardians. We met an English sportsman who was staying here, and from him obtained sundry complicated directions how to find our way to Insh. He also gave us a dram of fine old Glenlivet, and in regular highland fashion offered it in wine-glasses, neat. The fiery liquid wreaked such havoc on my vocal passages—possibly as a sequel to our late hydropathic treatment—that for some time my efforts to speak were like the chirp of a sparrow with a bad cold. We learned that we were only five miles from Insh; but, as the five miles took us nearly four hours, we felt more gratitude to our informant then than when we had grown wiser and sadder.

The hours of darkness that we spent in hunting the drenched moors beyond the Feshie for the township of Insh, were not the least trying of the day's experiences. But a veil of mystery is still drawn over that unhappy time, for on no map hitherto published have we succeeded in retracing the line of our wanderings. I have vivid recollections of a man who ran out of a house in shirt and drawers to put us on the right track, when he heard us making inquiries. We got to Insh just before midnight, tired, wet, and indecently hungry. The people at the inn had gone to bed, and kept us hammering a long while at the door, under the impression that we were certain well-known characters from Kingussie in quest of unlawful drinks. Like true highlanders, however, they forgave the unseasonableness when they heard our doleful tale;

and soon our clothes were simmering before a new-lit fire, and we were expelling the pangs of hunger with a mighty supper.

We were not astir very early next day, but caught the afternoon train to Aviemore, intending to spend the remainder of the day in loitering about Speyside and the forest. It was a perfect day for such loafing, bright, with an atmosphere purified by two days of rain. Not a shred remained of the thick drapery of mist and storm-cloud which had mantled the hills yesterday, and the mountains displayed all their features with an illusory clearness that reduced their apparent distance to scarcely a couple of miles. Streaks and patches of white, which were snow-fields furlongs in extent, striped their barren foreheads; and the perennial snow-wreath, known as the White Lady, which had gleamed unbrokenly for years right under "the frosty scalp of Cairngorm," but had disappeared in the hot summer of 1896, had resumed its old place of pre-eminence. Such a sight fired the imagination. Hamish was struck with enthusiasm, and was so much encouraged by the seeming nearness of the hills, that he exclaimed, "Why not go up to the Shelter Stone to-day?" I was not the one to put a damper on such meritorious eagerness; so we altered our plans forthwith, and prepared for the expedition.

We stuffed the rucksacks with as much in the way of miscellaneous provisions as we could lay hands on at the general store; but by a most unlucky accident

we could not get any bread. The seriousness of this did not, however, dawn upon our minds at first, and we proposed to make shift with a few scones and a larger allowance of oatcake that we secured in Rothiemurchus. Laden with the provender and with logs and sticks gathered in the forest, we did not reach the plateau, by way of the Lurcher's Rock, till the sun was disappearing.

But day was westerling, and the cloud
Down on the glooming summits bowed
Brought o'er his heart a sudden fear
Of night in that lone place austere.

The air of the tops was deliciously cool, iced by the wide stretches of snow; and the evening sky pure and serene, affording far views of the countless hill-ranges to the west, all aglow with the unearthly tints of sunset. In the north, the Moray Firth glimmered sombrely, with the dusky outlines of Ben Wyvis and his neighbours still uneclipsed by the gloaming. Near at hand, the Lurcher's Rock, on the verge of the Larig's cavernous abyss, and the swart crags that rim Coire an Lochain, looked mysterious and boding. The stern grey head of Ben Muich Dhui was already crowning itself with gloom; the peaks of Cairn Toul were growing momentarily darker against the fading sky; in the east, night reigned over Ben Avon and Ben a' Bhuid. It seemed as if they watched us with invisible eyes. The spectral light, the silence unbroken even by the chirrup of a bird, these solemn, impassible

shapes keeping perpetual vigil in their nightly solitude, filled one, irresistibly, with the sense of some unknown presence. One felt an instinctive dread, as if we denizens of a lower world had no right of entry to this region of calm, this abode of sleeping terrors. One hard-headed man I know has told me that nothing on earth would induce him to be alone on the top of Ben Muich Dhui, even in broad daylight; and relates how once he ran five miles without stopping down to Rothiemurchus Forest, in mortal panic. What it was he ran away from he will not divulge.

On reaching the edge of the enormous cliffs encircling the hollow which enfolds Loch Avon, with the Shelter Stone at its head, we found a heavy snow cornice running along the brow, through which the burns had quarried deep tunnels. A descent by the waterside was out of the question in these untoward circumstances; accordingly, we bore right across to the open slabby way that is the usual route from Ben Muich Dhui. Loaded as we were, the descent to the Stone took more than an hour. The big log I was carrying had a nasty trick of hitting me on the head at every steep drop, and my companion was not enjoying himself. It was about as dark as it ever gets on a mid-June night in the Highlands when we reached our bivouac. We had invented a beautiful cooking-pan—kettle, saucepan, frying-pan, and tea-pot, all in one—the capabilities of which we now put to the test; and when we had made the beds and prepared supper

there was but one drawback to our happiness, the dearth of bread.

My comrade slept very poorly, or not at all, either from the eeriness of the situation or the deficiencies of the meal. About four o'clock a chilly draught reminded us of our resolve to make an early start. It was a promising morning, very little mist about, and a freshness—almost a bite—in the air that was very exhilarating. At breakfast, the odd scones disappeared like a flash, and the only staff of life was now the oat-cake, which proved to be stale and dry, and about as toothsome as a confection of sawdust or disintegrated granite. I have never eaten oatcake with any relish since. Sardines, tinned tomatoes, and other delicacies went down tolerably by themselves. But when it came to eating bacon-fat with a spoon, we began to realise why bread is such an important element in the national diet. Vainly did I point out to my squeamish companion that fat is the most concentrated form of energy; he said he preferred his energy in the form of a sandwich. We looked at our boots; they were in obvious need of dubbin: so we put the bacon-fat on our boots, and trusted that the energy was not in the wrong place after all.

We were speedily afoot; but Hamish said he was feeling unwell, and we decided that he had better get back as soon as might be to better-appointed lodgings. We found a route near the Stag Rock which was clear of snow. It led us further to the north than we aimed,

and we crossed the wide plateau by the high point of Carn an Lochain (3,983 feet).¹ Thence we dropped gently to the edge of the precipitous descent into the Larig Ghru, at Carn na Criche, the Boundary Cairn where the three counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Inverness meet, a little north of the March Burn. Here there is a breach in the battlement of crag surmounting the slopes of scree, a breach enlarged by a recent landslip. Difficulty there would have been none in descending through this gap but for the looseness of everything; huge, shivered masses remained precariously fixed, and thousands of stones, of all shapes and sizes, lay poised on the wet ledges, ready to bombard the nether slopes the moment they were touched. One of us had, accordingly, to go in advance and clear away the most threatening missiles. It was a game that reminded one somewhat of the pranks played by the sportive tripper on Snowdon; but there was no help for it. Down went the boulders with an echoing plunge, over cliff and scree-shoot, into the channel of the burn, which was filled with compacted snow; and each, as it crashed into the drift, sent splashes of snow and spray high into the sunlight.

At nine we reached the Pools of Dee, a cluster of tiny crystal tarns, set in the waste of boulder and scree, with no visible inlet or outlet; they are fed by the waters of the March Burn, which disappears a little way up in the stony bed of the pass. It was once a

¹ This is *not* the Lurcher's Crag as the half-inch map asserts.

notable matter of dispute whether they or the Wells of Dee, on the elevated tableland behind the topmost wall of the Garbh Coire, into which their waters are precipitated, to be joined further down the Larig by the burn flowing from the Pools, are rightfully to be described as the source of the Dee. John Hill Burton is inclined to bestow the honour on this, the more sedate and unobtrusive stream, because of its character for meekness and sobriety ; as he quaintly puts it, this Aberdeenshire burn is “ not so desperately flighty as the Garchary,” the undisciplined torrent from the Wells of Dee ; and it does not indulge “ in those great leaps which, however surprising and worthy of admiration they may be in themselves, are not quite consistent with the calm dignity of a river destined to pass close to a university town.”

Hamish, unfortunately, had derived no benefit from our violent exercise in climbing down to the Larig, and still complained of being unwell ; so he now finally decided not to join me in completing last year’s programme and making the whole round of the western peaks, but to stroll quietly back to Rothiemurchus. Regretfully I watched him depart along the faint track of the Larig, until he was lost to sight in the wilderness of stones, varying in size from pebbles to village churches, which fills the higher reaches of the pass. Meanwhile, I held a straight course up Sron na Leirg, the bulky abutment of Braeriach, which rose immediately opposite. Long after I had

lost sight of him, as he told me later, he could make me out clearly on the sky-line. The ascent is stiff at first, but offers no serious difficulty, and presently eases off on to a broad expanse trending up towards the main plateau of Braeriach, the south-east front of which is a wall of crags. It was corniced in places with snow, and many of the gullies held drifted masses, on some of which there were traces of small avalanches. No wonder, for a heavy fall had covered the hills less than a week ago, replenishing what had been left by last winter.

The view instantaneously unfolded as one steps on to the fractured ridge leading to the cairn, comprises one of the most astonishing foregrounds, as distinguished from far-reaching prospects, in all the Highlands. Right beneath, all but surrounded by the shattered front of Braeriach, lies a hollow like a gigantic quarry, herbless and full of debris; this is Coire Brochain or the Porridge Corrie, so-called from the legend of a herd of deer that fell over and were reduced to porridge. It is one of the uppermost recesses of the mighty Garbh Coire. That enormous cirque occupies the middle of the vast scene, with the giant summits of the central Cairngorms grouped around it. An area broad and deep enough to let the eye take in the full stature of those proud heights, the Garbh Coire is itself almost bewildering in its misshapen ruggedness, an area of subsidiary heights and hollows, tall cliffs and dark ravines, smoking cataracts, snowy drifts,

and dark blue tarns, all flung together in most sublime confusion. The indented granite front of Braeriach itself, with the rectangular jointing of its walls, the profound fissures, and still more the salient rock-towers springing from the depths of the corrie, calls forcibly to mind the sea-beaten cliffs of Land's End.

Though Cairn Toul looks very near, less by a good deal than the actual bird's flight of a mile and three quarters, it is a walk of four or five miles to reach it, along the mural cliff forming the upper rim of the corrie. I hesitated at first to attempt it, with next to nothing to eat, and a poor breakfast to start with; for there was a fifteen-mile tramp home, after I should reach Cairn Toul, and that over the roughest ground in Britain, without the remotest chance of refreshment on the way. But how could one hesitate with such a walk before one, nearly five miles at a general level of four thousand feet above the sea—a walk absolutely unique in Britain, and on a day of such perfect visibility as this? But a curious incident, which probably meant that I was napping as I walked, after a short and bad night's rest, nearly led me to give up the expedition. Somewhere near the Eunach Cairn, one of the points that rise almost imperceptibly from the plateau, I must have sat down and fallen into a doze, and then started off without taking bearings. My objective was the slight dip between Braeriach and Cairn Toul, flanked by its nearer appendage, the Angel's Peak. On I went, confidently downhill, and

sure enough there were the two great peaks towering up in front, with a huge precipice stretched along between them. But it suddenly occurred to me that the change in the point of view had strangely altered their contours; and what was this enormous gulf between me and the wished-for summits? Tired and hungry, I began to feel disheartened. All at once, there shone up from the bottom of the gulf, which now I saw was a deep glen, the azure waters of Loch Eunach. The hallucination was explained. I had turned right round without knowing it, and the peaks I was making for were the peaks of the Sgoran Dubh, on the far side of Glen Eunach. Running back up the hill, I got in touch with the march cairns again, where Inverness-shire and Aberdeenshire meet, and struck across the broad, undulating plain, past the Wells of Dee, and many another shallow stream rippling merrily over the sand and gravel, on the way to their headlong plunge into the Garbh Coire.

The views wax in grandeur at every step. On one hand, the huge, chaotic mass of the western Cairngorms drooped gradually to an enormous peat-moss, where the head waters of many rivers, among them our recent enemy the Eidart, gather together, before cutting their way down through a desert of mountains untrodden but by a rare stalker. On the other, across the airy depths of the Garbh Coire and the Larig Ghru, the central bulk of Ben Muich Dhui, separated to left and right by gullies from the long and lofty red wall of the pass,

presents by far its noblest front; and, in the blue remoteness, fold upon fold of dim, uncertain profiles, stretched away to infinity. In such a solitude, amidst shapes so deeply suggestive of latent power, one could not avoid a well-nigh overwhelming sense of one's personal helplessness and insignificance. Said Shairp, of a kindred scene :

In deep of noon, mysterious dread
Fell on me in that glimmering glen,
Till, as from haunted ground, I fled
Back to the kindly homes of men.

Certainly, to feel the spell of the mountains in all its strength, one must be alone—and, perhaps, fasting.

By this time I had reached the Angel's Peak, and Cairn Toul was heaving up its crest from the saddle in front. My path was up the very brink of the Garbh Coire, or rather of its lofty upper corrie, in which rests the exquisite blue tarn Lochan Uaine. Right to the top, it is a scramble over gigantic boulders piled at all angles, where one must needs be on the alert at every step, for this would be an unlucky place to get a sprain in. The nearest house is many wild leagues away, and one's bones might be whitening before the next traveller found them in such a solitude. Some such reflection had just occurred to me, when, to my amazement, just as I reached the northern cairn of the mountain and turned round, I saw a man, three hundred yards behind, and apparently in chase. I could hardly believe he was real. Could it be an evocation

of my disordered brain, the result of hunger, bad oat-cake, and insomnia? Surely, a forester had not taken the trouble to climb four thousand feet to inform me that I was trespassing in the deer forest. He was not long in catching me up, and turned out to be a climber from Aviemore, who had actually been in my wake for several hours, having ascended Braeriach from Glen Eunach, to which he had driven through Rothiemur-chus Forest. Such was my first acquaintance with Mr A. L. Bagley, now a well-tried mountaineering friend. It was a lucky meeting in every way; we both had to find a way down, and the prospect of company was cheering to both.

We retraced our steps as far as the March Cairn, without reascending the Angel's Peak; then we sought the quickest route down to Loch Eunach, the cloistered waters of which looked the acme of coolness on this burning day. Before we reached the crags, I all but stepped on a ptarmigan. She was sitting so close as to be almost invisible among the stones, and had to be lifted off her nest, when eight mottled eggs were disclosed. We missed the shooters' track leading down to the bothy, and found ourselves descending into Coire Clach. This is walled by a barrier of cliffs, but we hit upon a shallow gully down which we scrambled, and were soon beginning our ten-mile tramp home beside the foaming Bennie home. My sick friend, I was glad to find, had recovered so satisfactorily that he thoroughly enjoyed flinging bucket after

bucket of water over my tired frame, whilst I stood knee-deep in the burn, revelling in a longed-for bathe before dining.

About a year later the plans of three climbers were again turned to derision by Cairngorm weather. We set out one morning from Rothiemurchus to cross to Glen Dee, proposing to bivouac at the Shelter Stone, and announced that we should be back in about five days. It was brightening overhead after several days of rain, and the weather seemed hopeful. But, before we had even reached the Larig, a steady downpour began, and drove us back to the deserted shieling at Aultdrue. Here, as matters went from bad to worse, we determined to stay for the present; and, making a fire, we lunched and waited events. All to no purpose. The rain went on till evening, when we slunk home. Another wet morning next day; nevertheless, before noon we were off again. We had left our rucksacks at the shieling, slung on the ends of long sticks between roof and wall as a precaution against the rats. Down came the rain as soon as we were in sight of our shelter, and there we waited two hours; after which, we gave up our project of crossing the hills, and decided to be content with a scramble on the Sgoran Dubh.

This is the western ridge of the Cairngorms, bending round from Braeriach and Cairn Toul and enclosing the deep and narrow glen in which lies Loch Eunach. Crowned by several peaks, the highest of which is

Sgor Ghaoith (3,659 feet), the Windy Peak, it sends down a precipice forming a long wall on the east, where we had heard there was any amount of climbing. At the cost of an extra wetting in the drenched under-growth and the bogs, we made a short cut across the forest, into the stalker's road to Glen Eunach, scaring more than one shy roe-deer in the glades. We were approaching the outskirts of the immense woodland stretching far along the Spey. Here we are on an ancient battlefield, where a tragic struggle is still going on, between the woods and the mountains. The undulating levels are broken by the invasion of descending spurs and buttresses, along whose flanks stately old warrior pines still hold their own, aged pines of muscular limb and monumental bole. Shielded by them, more firs of various generations and various stature, down to last year's seedlings, rise out of the tangle of juniper, heather, and fragrant bog-myrtle. The birches here are few, but now and then a cluster of rowans mingle their soft foliage with the pines. Further up the slopes, a few stunted and blasted trees, almost overwhelmed by the scree, mark the edge of the conflict. The solitude was profound. It gave us a sort of shock to come upon a man fishing. He was spared any shock, for he never heard or saw us; his day of loneliness was probably undisturbed save by the deer. We met with a herd as we emerged from the domain of the pines, and other herds showed themselves from time to time on the open moor, melting

away mysteriously like wraiths of the mist. They were not shy yet, never having heard a shot fired since last autumn. In the neck of the glen below the loch are numerous moraines, some of them enormously big and as regular in shape as railway embankments. Many perched blocks are to be seen also, and glaciated stones are common. But the whole of the Cairngorms are full of such conspicuous traces of the Ice Age.

A little above the first bothy is Loch Mhic Ghille-chaoile, the Loch of the Lanky Man's Son, the name of which is the memorial of a crime in the old lawless days. A party of cattle-reivers from Lochaber came down through Glen Eunach and were driving off a herd, when the news was carried to Rothiemurchus church, all the villagers being at divine service. They set off at once in pursuit; but the young man after whom the tarn is named outstripped the rest, and came up with the thieves at this spot. In the scuffle that ensued, the youth was killed; the murderers hid his body under a stone, and fled, without their booty. Years after, a Lochaber woman told the tale of the slaying to friends of the lad, and his body was found; but his slayers escaped punishment at the hands either of revenging relatives or of the law. Such romantic histories, not always gloomy however, are implied in the name of pool and stream, wood, rock, and corrie, all over this untamed district.

Glen Eunach had a cold and cheerless mien to-

day. Mists were furling and unfurling about the lower buttresses of the Sgoran Dubh precipice, overhead a denser canopy hid the peaks, and the white torrent at the head of the loch appeared to be proceeding from the brooding clouds, of which it seemed a condensation scarcely more palpable. We crossed the bridge at the tail of the loch, and followed the broad sandy beach to the base of the cliffs. Without a rope, it behoved us to choose a climb of comparative ease and safety, and we knew there was such a one to be found close to the main buttress of Sgor Ghaoith; but it was more or less at a venture that we started up the cliffs where they made a slight trend inwards. A tough pull up slopes of scrubby heather led to the first bit of rock-work. It was easy, and we went up rapidly for the first few hundred feet. Soon we were right in the mist. The loch grew vague and wan, and then disappeared; we were shut in above and below. Coming to a steepish rib, the edge of which was disintegrated and insecure, we were obliged to retire, and at a lower level traverse into a shallow gully. All went well for a time, but then the gully ceased to be a gully, sound holds gave out, and we were forced on to the slight ridge beyond. The third man pushed ahead rapidly, whilst I stayed behind to lend a hand to the youngest member of the party, who was in difficulties. Just as I had got him on to the ridge, and was trying to hoist myself up the crumbling, holdless wall, there came a yell, from apparently two hundred feet above, "Look



SGOR GHAOITH, SGORAN DUBH

Photo by Dr. Carnegie Dickson.]

out, below there!" followed by the crash of falling stones. My carcase was in the natural channel for falling bodies, but there was nothing to be done but glue oneself to the rock and shrink to the smallest dimensions. Then the little avalanche came crashing over. One big chap had a good try at shearing off my right ear, and a shower of fragments hit my back smartly and grazed my head. Others followed, but bounded over. When the deluge of stones, sand, and dirt ceased, I found that the only damage was raw and bleeding finger-ends, cut by the quartz crystals in holding feverishly to the rotten granite. My comrade on the adjoining ridge was hardly touched. It turned out that our friend, in his reckless haste, had disturbed a loose stone, and had been obliged to let go to save himself.

Instead of following him directly, we turned an awkward corner, crept up the angle between wall and bed of a steep gully, and met him where two prominent cliffs walled this in, making it deep and funnel-shaped. The bottom pitch of the funnel was smooth and water-worn. We debated whether we ought to go on. Nobody, however, wanted to retreat down that last two hundred feet, so we voted for an earnest effort to reach the summit, which could hardly be far away now. Above the smooth pitch, the gully eased off, and then widened out into an open court with a smooth, steep pavement. There was only one exit above, a chimney that obviously called for a stiff bit of back-

and-kneeling. But the position was far too much exposed to justify taking my two companions up that way, without a rope. It looked at first as if the inevitable alternative was a night out; we did, however, find a way of escape. Although we had examined the walls of the court very carefully, we had not paid much attention to a gap on the west, which in truth offered nothing to encourage it. But, letting myself down over some steep grass to which the gap gave access, I discovered that it might be possible to crawl sideways over a series of slabs, and drop into a little gully, down which a rivulet passed to join a larger water-course that we could hear clattering just out of eye-shot. Our six-foot friend put his superior reach at our disposal, and by making a sort of bridge of him we all reached the gully in safety, and thence the larger water-course. After that our descent was very, very wet, but offered no genuine difficulty.

The weather recovered after this, and we had a day on Cairngorm, another in the lovely Findhorn valley below Dunphail, and time also for divers wanderings about the forest, which never looked better or smelt more fragrant than after the wet. Then we hatched a scheme for climbing Ben Avon, the eastern-most and least accessible of the greater Cairngorms. The problem was where to sleep, so as to be within reasonable distance of the summit. The Shelter Stone was too far off from the mountain; Inchrory, the first place of the slightest importance in Glenavon,

was too far from us. But half-way between, the map showed a black speck called Findouran Lodge, which was presumably inhabited by a forester. Perhaps we could get a shake-down there, as we had in similar places before. If not, we could but risk a night on the heather. Ready for all emergencies, accordingly, we bent our steps up Cairngorm, one fine day, crossed the summit, and descended to the edge of the cliffs overlooking Loch Avon and the Shelter Stone. To two of us, that lone hostelry was now an old acquaintance, and we pointed out with a sort of pride to our companion the heap of monoliths amid which it lies. "What, the Shelter Stone in that little ash-heap?" was his exclamation. It was rather annoying, his inability to judge the real dimensions of the objects in this tremendous hollow. Through the chorus of innumerable streams that echoes up between the gigantic sounding-boards, one seemed to distinguish the dominant note of the Garbh Uisge, which, after swallowing up divers other burns, becomes the head stream of Loch Avon. To our irreverent companion, this stream, which had once in spate nearly cut us off from the old smugglers' refuge, was merely a thin, twisting rivulet that a child could bestaddle.

Where we came down to the tail of the loch, we had a good view of the peculiar effects of light and colour that many persons have noticed here. It is as if an iridescent fluid had been poured over the surface of the lake. Near this point, one of those enormous

furrows, cutting north and south deep into the Cairngorms, opens almost at right angles into Glenavon. Hid from us behind a low saddle, rises the head stream of the Nethy, and flows down this furrow to the north. Another mile, and we reached the third of these colossal trenches, if the Larig Ghru be counted as the first, though Glen Feshie, far away west, might also be reckoned as another. This last deep trough, the Larig an Laoigh, cuts through to Deeside, and makes a perpendicular where it crosses Glenavon, to which it contributes a good-sized burn on each side. Vast mementoes these of the sculpturing in the glacial epoch, when Loch Avon itself originated, and the moraine-heaps and perched blocks round about us were laid down. In the palmy days of sheep farmers and cattle drovers, the Larig an Laoigh was a well-used thoroughfare; but the place looks now as though no man had been there since the world began. A few worn stones near the ford did, at first, suggest a track; but we failed to discern any continuation. A flight of six wild geese that came winging silently through the Larig, southward bound, added a more inhuman touch to the gloom and austerity.

Inhospitable as was this spot in every aspect, we had gone a long way without a meal, and we had better sit down now and have it. The packs were untied, and in the one containing the cooker a doleful sight met our eyes. The owner had been instructed to pack a dozen eggs in this receptacle; but to save time he



LOCH AVON IN SPRING



LOCH AVON IN SUMMER

had omitted the paper. Three eggs were miraculously delivered from the wreck, but the cracked shells of the others were floating in a dense liquor of rich orange hue, which a leaky bottle of coffee-essence had tinged with a shading of sepia. The sticky brew had soaked through a sweater and his spare stockings, and made a pool in the depths of the bag. We gazed in silent grief at the wasted nutriment, till one, more exhausted or less finical than the others, seized the pan and drained it with great relish, remarking that it had a vanilla flavour.

There is a rough track down Glenavon, which, for the next few miles, is a dreary defile between Ben a' Bhuid and a featureless hill on the other side. At nine o'clock Findouran Lodge hove in sight, a comfortable cottage of one story, set amidst a forbidding landscape. But our hopes were suddenly crushed: the house was untenanted. What to do now was a trying question. There was no Shelter Stone here; there were no rocks at all worth mentioning. A night in the heather in June is a poetic thing to dream about; but there was hardly a shred of heather, nothing but bog, bog, and the rushing Avon. Inchrory, many miles off, was hopelessly far; one of the party was foot-sore and could not do another mile. There was nothing for it; we must break in, whatever the consequences. The house had two doors, one of which gave easily; but it was only the peat-shed. The lock of the other had to be forced, and we entered. Inside

we found a comfortable living-room, where we soon had a fire lighted, and proceeded to cook supper. We also found evidences that we had committed a burglary on the premises of a ducal owner. Anyhow, it was no use letting our scruples disturb our hard-earned rest. We made an excellent meal, smoked our pipes before a comfortable peat-fire, and went to bed. My two comrades took the adjoining bedroom, which had a bed with blankets and sheets and pillows, all complete, though it was vain to speculate when these had last been aired. My couch was on a folding bedstead in the living-room, where, rolled in a big blanket, I slept like a top. They complained in the morning that the sheets were, not merely damp, but wet; and were remarkably early risers.

At breakfast, we had to reconsider our plans. For the lame man, Ben Avon was evidently impossible, and my friend the Cairngormer said he would take him back to Rothiemurchus, since he could not be left to go alone. Should I risk Ben Avon by myself, with the imminent possibility of a night out under more trying conditions? Rather cravenly, I caved in, and threw in my lot with the other two. We left money on the table to pay for the damaged lock, and a note explaining that three tourists had been obliged by the accidents of travel to seek shelter in the house; and soon after breakfast we set out on the return journey.

Regaining the cross-roads formed by Glenavon and the Larig an Laoigh, we turned north along the latter,

and were at once on new ground. The Larig slopes up a little, to surmount the great toe of Ben Bynac, on whose broad shoulders the Barns tower conspicuously, isolated granite piles curiously like those of Dartmoor. Somewhere, by a streamlet, if anyone happens to pass that way, he may find, or may long ago have found, a not quite empty flask, which was left behind, not with forethought, to mark another lunching-place. The long, weary track rises half-way up the Ben, and traverses a sandy table-land of considerable extent, where we saw many deer gambolling in shallow pools, stags, hinds, and fawns—a pretty sight in the sparkling sunshine. Coming over the brow, we had below us Abernethy Forest stretching to the Spey, and on the left the Thieves' Pass between the spurs of Cairngorm and the Kincardine Hills. Through this, with no more exciting incident than a dip in the chill waters of Lochan Uaine, the grey-blue tarn that lies in the throat of the pass, we meandered home to Rothiemurchus. Next day we were away to fresh peaks and scrambles new.

My next night out in the Cairngorms was not such a tame affair. My climbing partner was a veteran cragsman, and we were bent on searching out what rock-climbs the walls of the Larig and the face of Braeriach had to offer worthy of our art, and furthermore, to pay a visit to Lochnagar, on the other side of the Dee. I have made several strenuous attempts to reach Lochnagar from the Spey side of the moun-

tains, but, invariably, fate has been untoward, and I have never yet seen the famous cliffs at close quarters. But that is anticipating. Harsh experience had taught me that sleeping out was unavoidable if we wanted time for serious rock-work. We laid our plans accordingly. One fine day we strolled up to the Larig Ghru, carrying a rope, a rug, and a load of provisions. The rope we required for a scramble on Creag na Leacainn; the other things we cached at a suitable spot near the summit of the pass, in readiness for a bivouac.

We had never explored the Creag, or the Lurcher's Rock, as it is often called, with any minuteness, though I had repeatedly skirted the broken wall overhanging the slopes on my way down into the Larig. We found it consists of two ranges of cliff, one the mere wreck of an escarpment, the other more solid and continuous, and abounding in climbs of the most attractive appearance. But, so far as we were concerned, appearances were delusive. It may have been that we had lost our nerve; for we had recently gone through the trying experience in Arran which is related in another chapter. At all events, both here and on Braeriach later on, the climbs proved either ridiculously easy or, if they presented any difficulty at all, dangerous and beyond our powers.

Meanwhile, we had sent changes of clothes round to Braemar, and a day or two later set off from Rothiemurchus, with another rug and the remainder of the commissariat, to climb Braeriach and spend the follow-

ing night in the Larig. A native warned us that bad weather was brewing in the north, and would be down on us before nightfall. In the forest it was a hot day, and the wind sat in the south. If a storm were coming, it would surely, thought we, approach from that quarter, where the two deep rents in the mountain wall, the Larig Ghru and Glen Eunach, were like steaming reservoirs pouring dense volumes of cloud to the firmament. Turning a deaf ear to the warning, we congratulated ourselves on our meteorological acumen, as we saw the mists slowly but steadily lifting, until we reached the pass and all was clear. Whether we should make our first bivouac in the pass or in the upper regions of the Garbh Coire was a question finally settled by the weight of our impedimenta when we had picked up the contents of our cache. To lug such a burden up the steep slopes of Braeriach's buttress, Sron na Leirg, would only be worth doing if we meant to stay for a week. The spot we had chosen did not please us to-day; but it was hard to find a better. Large boulders are only too plentiful hereabouts; yet a stone that we could lie under or behind with a reasonable chance of shelter if it came on to rain, was nowhere to be seen. We fixed provisionally on a little hollow near the margin of a wide stretch of stones. There a tuft or two of wiry grass and a profusion of beech and oak fern grew delicately amid the prevailing nakedness; but the chief advantage was that the mounded boulders screened it from

the biting south wind, while a stream tinkled close at hand beneath the rocks. Removing some heavy stones, we uncovered a convenient rillet hard by the proposed site of our fireplace. So we ate our luncheon, bestowed our belongings under the lee of the boulders, and set off up the Sron for the summit of Braeriach.

As regards rock-climbing, the day was not a success. We had even less luck than on the Lurcher's Rock, for a terrific gale made it perilous to venture on exposed places. To me, the interest was concentrated on our return downhill through the mazes of the Garbh Coire. From almost every other point of view, I knew it well; this was the first time I actually went down it. In the dusk of a lowering day the vast hollow was at its grimmest. All the tragic soul of Scotland's past seems to be embodied in the desolate grandeur of Glencoe; here, in the ancient abode of the glacier and the ice-fall, Nature's powers of destruction seem ever to be lightly slumbering, ready to awake at a moment's summons. As day set, and we picked our way through the debris slowly towards the pass, now filling with darkness visibly, all things grew more chill and melancholy. Yet we hoped against hope that the weather would spare us; even when a splash of rain smote our cheeks we were comforted by the fact that the wind was still south, while the storm was prognosticated from the north.

We regained the Larig, a mile below our retreat—a weary mile across the stony wilderness. All the

way we looked for a better sort of refuge, but could see none worth shifting our furniture for. We were fantastically laden with trailing stems of juniper, which we had gathered in the corrie for fuel; for heather does not grow so high, in fact, there is little vegetation at all but sub-alpine plants, in which the Garbh Coire abounds. Soon we were busy erecting a fireplace and getting supper laid. With damp fuel, for several showers had now passed over, the fire was slow to kindle; but, once alight, the juniper and the pine-branch carried up from the forest made a steady blaze. Meanwhile, we laid courses of flattish stones on the two big blocks in the angle of which our bed was to lie. How we wished for the roof of the Shelter Stone over our heads! But that was far away on the other side of Ben Muich Dhui. We were out for an adventure, and we must make shift to see it through. By the time the cooking-pan boiled, we had raised a little rampart on the windward side of our nest, and felt tolerably secure so long as the gale blew from the south. On the north, we merely put a stone or two, filling all in with fern, which the rain had unfortunately soaked, and above that we spread a rug. Needless to say, we had weeded out such stones as stuck out too aggressively underneath; though even now our couch was, as my comrade put it, a little bit "bricky." Coffee and a smoke put a luxurious finish on the meal, and at eight-thirty we were ready for bed. Already it was dark, but this was the result of the thick

mist sweeping over, apparently but a few yards above our heads. There was too much wind to keep a candle alight, so we took a brand of juniper from the fire and used it as a torch.

The question who should take the outside of our narrow bed was by no means an indifferent one. We tossed, and my friend won the inside berth. We pulled our woollen caps over ears and chin, loosened our clothes, laid our heads on the rucksacks, and drew the top rug over. My last duty was to tuck both of us in, which I did with care, so as to leave no crevice for the rain. And now we might say, by a bold figure of speech, that we composed ourselves to rest and sleep. Probably we did sleep, or drop into a state of semi-consciousness, oftener than we were aware; but our impression of that night is one of cramped positions endured with fortitude till the flesh rebelled, of tiny inequalities in our bed growing by slow yet well-marked degrees into knobs of torture, of anxious hours of watching broken by intervals of nightmare, and a general breakdown of our mutual amiability. The only soothing influence was the little burn, which must have run right underneath our resting-place, to judge by the musical gurgle it kept up all night. Peeping out, we could see the black walls of the pass, and the mist, showing white against them, still drifting up from the south. But at some hour of the night the wind changed round to the north, and, as had been predicted so long before, a storm broke over us. The

first warning was a sudden feeling of chill on the outer side. Then a wet gust struck us, and looking out we found that what might euphemistically have been called a Scotch mist had changed to a downpour. The water dribbled off the sheltering stones and pattered down on our rucksacks, and these pillows soon held little pools. Neither of us could pretend to be asleep long after that: the closure was removed, and observations on the weather ceased to provoke wrathful grunts from the sleeping partner. We lay quiet for perhaps an hour in the twilight. It was not very comfortable, but the wet rug over us still shot off much water that would have soaked in had we been afoot.

At last, however, the driving rain came in freely at several points, cramp attacked our legs, and somewhere about five a.m. we got up. Something hot would have put a different complexion on things, but to light a fire was now impossible, though we had stored away fuel overnight on purpose. We took our breakfast cold; it was one of the coldest breakfasts we ever ate. Bedraggled objects we were, cowering under the drenched rug, which we had drawn over our heads, tent-fashion, as we sat at meat; it was woollen, and had quadrupled or thereabouts in weight with the moisture. While in this pickle, we had each fondled in our own breasts, as we afterwards admitted, a hope that the other man would propose to abandon the expedition and return to Rothiemurchus; but, alas! neither had the moral courage to speak the first word.

At or about five-forty-five—there are doubts as to the exact time, for the only watch we had with us was indisposed—we packed up our traps, stowed the cooker and certain other things in the cache, and started south.

Up to this moment we had been wet in patches; now all parts that had escaped were reduced to an even degree of saturation. We could not see far in the mist, but in the Larig there is no room for missing your way. If you lose sight of the cairns you are thrust back to them before long by the slope or by the ruggedness of the ground; they simply mark the line of least resistance. Last night the Pools of Dee had been almost empty; this morning they were not only deeper and swollen into fair-sized tarns, there were actually more of them, for the overflow had filled several hollows hard by. Once well over the summit and clear of the wearisome piles of boulders, we got up a rattling pace down the Larig. The Garbh Coire, as we beheld it yesterday, had seemed the uttermost of savagery and desolation; since then the latent forces of the hills had been unpent, and the wild scene as we came opposite the gigantic opening of the corrie, down which a tempestuous torrent galloped to meet the roaring stream of the Larig, was sterner yet. Through the quivering sheets of mist the slopes of Cairn Toul loomed darkly; the rocks were magnified and distorted; and a confusion of noises, from the streams, the wind, and the waterfalls, beat on our ears.

About six-forty-five a.m. the stark shape of the Devil's Point uprose on the further side of the pass; we had come nearly four miles at a good speed, and should soon be rounding the shoulder of Carn a' Mhaim and quitting the valley of the turbulent infant Dee, to join it again miles ahead by way of Glen Luibeg. Derry Lodge, or even Luibeg Cottage, the first inhabited house since we left home, was still nearly four miles off. There we might obtain the temporary succour of a fire and something warm inside, though ten more miles would have to be covered before we could hope for a lodging. One or the other of us happened at this moment to observe, "It was almost a pity we didn't go straight home when we got up." The other replied, "Then why didn't you propose it?" This unexpected unanimity led to a sudden halt, and we debated whether it was too late for such a decisive change of plan. We were anxious to do Lochnagar if possible. But the fine weather had evidently broken up. Lochnagar would be inaccessible for the present; and the sequel, another thirty-mile tramp home through the Larig a day or two later did not allure us. The last consideration settled it. We hesitated no longer, but with all reluctance turned back, deeply repenting that we had not done so earlier.

We were not dead yet. Reascending the pass in the teeth of a stiff northerly gale was hard work; but we kept up a good pace, walking with our heads down, and jumping innumerable streams and bogs. Our

tribulations culminated when we reached that awful region of stones again. So thick was the mist at the summit of the pass that we could not see from one stone man to the next, but floundered anywhere, heedless of landmarks. The wind swirled round us, the rain lashed like whips; we were unable to detect an ounce of animal heat in our systems. Forebodings of imminent pneumonia harassed us. Soon after eight a.m. we were back at our den and gathered up the rest of our property. Our fingers were much too benumbed to open a tin of anything, but we hacked slices off the loaf and tried to eat. Only a weak drain of whisky was in the flask, and this my teetotal friend stanchly refused to share with me. I drank it off, but, whether it saved my life in the long-run or not, it had no visible effect. Our hands were swollen with wet and cold; our joints were stiff; and, with our heavy loads, our shoulders and backs were aching. No wonder we were cold: the storm left the higher slopes covered with snow next morning. In December, of course, the body is acclimatised; but this was August.

We struggled Speywards beneath our packs for another mile, keeping up the best pace we could as the best help for the exposure. Then we felt it was too much. The weight was not only more than we could stand in our exhausted condition, but was also seriously retarding our return to warmth and rest. At the dell where we had made our first cache we flung everything down again, to be fetched home on another day. Again we went on, immensely relieved. Every



ROTHIEMURCHUS FOREST

object seemed marvellously changed since yesterday, though, to tell the truth, we could not see many yards through the storm. The intermittent burn was now an uninterrupted river, and at the fording-place we had difficulty in crossing. The broad stretch of moorland between the pass and the forest, which we had found some days previously a tract of dried-up peat-moss, with no water but undrinkable black drainings from the moss-hags, was now all a-swim. At every few yards a stream flowed across the track, many of them both wide and deep. We plunged through, reckless of all but to get home quickly. How hospitable the first pines of Rothiemurchus Forest looked! It was as if the weather moderated with the first glimpse of the woods. The beating rain changed to drifting showers; the mist lightened, disclosing the miles of dusky forest and the green of the cultivated lands at Tullochgrue. Then at last we saw beneath us the deserted haven of Alitdrue, and we felt we were nearing home.

We got in at eleven-thirty a.m., having walked sixteen or seventeen miles since breakfast—excellent time in the state we were in, but none too soon. After the application of something hot both without and within, we went incontinently to bed, where we made up arrears till dinner. Many experiences of hard work and exposure had we met with in years gone by, but in this case the last was really the worst; and when several days elapsed and no sign of a terrible chill appeared, we were astonished.

IV

ACROSS THE BACKBONE OF SCOTLAND

There, or westward away, where roads are unknown to Loch Nevish,
And the great peaks look abroad over Skye and the westernmost islands.

I LOOK back now on my tramp with Mac across Scotland with more astonishment than pride at my endurance, for it was done in a pair of new boots, which is poor testimony to my good sense. We had not premeditated a walk from sea to sea, but merely wanted to get as quickly as we could, by any means at our disposal, among the big hills at the head of Glen Affric. But, on arriving at Beauly, we found that the mail-coach did not start for another three hours; so, rather than cool our heels there, we set off in advance. Thus it came about that we footed it right to Loch Duich, on the other side, beginning with a thirty-mile day, in addition to my three miles to the railway; and carrying weight withal—a somewhat rash preliminary to a week on the tops.

The Beauly River marks a very ancient highway between the east and west coasts; and at least one Mackenzie of westernmost Kintail, was interred in the Priory of Beauly, instead of the customary burying-place in Iona. The river has a variety of names. It begins as a stalwart burn, with the name of Gleann Fionn

attaching to it, away among the west coast peaks. Then it becomes the Affaric, a king among highland rivers, with Lochs Affaric and Beneveian, majestic twain, expanding out of it. Rushing in a series of smoking linns through the barriers of Glen Affaric, it suddenly assumes a pacific character as the River Glass, ambling quietly between tilth and meadow. Last, it takes the name of Beauly, and sweeps in a final paroxysm of fury down to Kilmorack, whence it marches with the dignified gait of age to its rest. Half its course lies between the highest hills north of Glen Albyn, the culminating ridge of Wester Ross being the huge humpy spine on the north bank, whereon peaks rising over the 3,000 foot level are mere incidents in the ascent of Mam Soul and Carn Eige, both of which all but reach 4,000 feet.

The road up the Beauly Gorge is very like the drive through the pass of the Tummel to the Queen's View, except in its utter loneliness. In the first twenty miles, we met with as many solitary woodland churches, old Catholic or Presbyterian, as we met people, about half a dozen of each ; that is, if we omit a troop of schoolgirls who came skipping out barefoot at Struy to fetch their bottles of milk, left to cool in a streamlet till lunch-time. The redoubled thunder of Beauly River summoned us to turn aside, at Kilmorack, into a graveyard full of Camerons and MacDonalds, with not one headstone bearing a Saxon-sounding name. In the Western Isles the dead are buried within hearing of the sea ; but this windy

platform above the falls is fully as sublime in its perfect fitness to be the last resting-place of the hill-men. Under the cliffs that bound it, the river bursts from a narrow chasm, plunging, leaping, and foaming over a waste of naked rock, and raising around this lonely grave-plot its everlasting dirge. Woods, interminable woods, stretch away to the hills, and out of their dark depths, on the far side of the river, rise the sandstone towers of Beaufort Castle, the seat of the Frasers.

All the way through the Druim, a pass not unlike the famous gorge of the Durance, the river's voice is omnipotent, rumbling in the hollow belly of its canyon, storming through barricades of fallen rock, sounding a clearer note where a stream drops down from the opposite cliffs. Near Eilean Aigas, lofty pinnacles of crumbling sandstone tower out of the pent-up waters, islands so tall and steep and narrow, they look as if the stream in some spasm of wrath would overturn them, and dam the ravine. The road runs like a cornice above the gorge, and is not less dangerous than it looks. At one point, a month ago, a traction engine came to the off-side to let a carriage pass, and fell over the edge, two men being killed. The engine lay out of sight, the wreck of the two wagons still encumbered the slopes and ledges.

Once or twice, at a turn of the road, a cloud-capped peak came into view far up the glen, beckoning us on to the delectable mountains. Where the pass opens out into Strath Glass, we met two wayfarers, one a tall, thin, wolfish-looking tramp, with a fiddle, the other

an inoffensive cottar, who alleged that the tramp was threatening to knock him down. The wandering minstrel glowered at us, but did not beg; we had disturbed him at a surer method of levying alms. Cannich hove in sight before the coach; we were a good seventeen miles to the good. There we passed the last post office we should see for several days; the last fully-licensed house was at Beauly, more than fifty miles from our destination, Shiel Inn. Years before, the owners of the deer forests had done their worst for the tourist, by getting the hotels closed, in defiance of local petitions and general protest.

Now the road dropped to the Affaric, a most companionable stream, who was to be our way-fellow for nearly thirty miles. At the Chisholms' Pass there is an end of the meadows, and for a while nothing is visible but trees. Then the road climbs to a height, and once more the air is full of the thunderous roar of a torrent, urging its way through intractable rocks. Far below, through feathery birches, the splendour of flying waters glances and sparkles. Then we catch the gleam of a waterfall, and the din increases. Somewhere below, in a deep black chasm, the Dog Fall hews a channel through the cliff; the blocks of schist which it has quarried out cumber the gorges beyond. Even within sound of this tempest of waters, one feels a strange oppression at the silence and lifelessness of the forest. We had heard no bird sing all day, nothing more melodious than the grasshopper, and the only wild beast we saw was a viper, which we slew; until,

late in the evening, we came face to face with a solitary hind, to our mutual embarrassment.

We had kept up a swinging pace all day, in spite of the punishment my feet were suffering ; and we were glad to be near our first stop. By Mac's diplomacy, this was secured in the very heart of the forbidden country, right on the shore of Loch Affaric, a swim in whose refreshing waters and careful doctoring of my ailing foot prepared me next morning for an early start. But the day looked doubtful. At the head of the glen, the black tops of Ben Fhada (Ben Attow) and the Scour Ouran ridge, with their big snow-wreaths, showed clear under heavy clouds. Last night they had been invisible. But there was an ominous calm, and the mists on Mam Soul, nearer at hand, augured ill to our plan of bagging all the summits on that long north ridge. We lopped peak after peak off our programme, and set out tentatively to climb the Mam itself, hoping that more might be attainable as the day wore on.

A stalking-path winds from the lake-side up into a deep corrie between Sgurr na Lapaich and a western league-long buttress of Mam Soul. It rapidly steepens, and here the effects of our intemperate walk of the day before began to show themselves. My aching foot seemed to have upset the machinery altogether, and I felt oft-times as if the next step would be my last, and as if nothing better could be wished for. But Mac kept up the pace remorselessly, and would not agree to longer halts than the regular allowance. Doubtless

he was not unwise, though I regarded him as a Torquemada. Later in the morning, when we sat down for a final rest, high on the misty shoulder of Mam Soul, to my delight he dropped off to sleep, and I took every precaution to let him have his nap out.

Some hundreds of feet below this, we were looking up at the snows in the gullies of Ciste Dubh, the next peak on the main ridge, when an eagle came flying out of the corrie. It was only a chick, my friend told me; but he was six feet across the pinions, and at such close quarters looked majestic. With a few strokes of his broad vans and then a glide, he sailed out across Glen Affaric to the savage hills beyond. On the slopes high up we tumbled upon the remains of his meal, just enough of the bones to recognise a fawn newly killed, and a feather or two of his slayer to tell the tale. Many deer were in the corrie. Over the shoulder where we were resting we looked into a bigger and gloomier hollow than the one we had ascended; Carn Eige and Tom a' Choinnich formed its other boundary, and rose in front of us like the wall of another world, crowned with impenetrable mist and darkness.

The fresh air of the tops soon cured our drowsiness. We climbed smartly to the cairn of Mam Soul, and a noble erection it proved. On one side a shelter had been built against it for two watchers, evidently one of the strategic points established by the late W. L. Winans for his numerous foresters and sentinels, whose duty it was to watch the movements of the

noxious tourist, when that great son of Nimrod had piled forest on forest to make his gigantic deer park. Here we took refuge from the wet mist, which in other latitudes one would call rain. Presently, while I was nursing my aggrieved leg, I saw Mac strolling off. "Where are you going?" I shouted. "To Carn Eige," he replied. "Carn Eige isn't over there; that's the way we came up." To this he replied that he had, as usual on arrival at the cairn, carefully placed his stick pointing in the direction we had come, and demonstrated by observation and deduction that he could not by any possibility be mistaken. Since he was a distinguished authority on highland topography and a born hill-man to boot, I urged my misgivings with bated breath. My friend was, moreover, an Aberdonian, and the man is not born who would contradict an Aberdonian to his face, or if born he has not survived. I followed submissively. We descended 400 feet by aneroid, taking note of divers things we had certainly not observed on the way up, fancying even that the roar of the burns in the corrie was pitched in a different key. Then we found ourselves below the mist for a moment; and, at that instant, caught a glimpse of the snow-ringed tarn beneath the ridge where we had enjoyed our snooze. I said nothing, as, with one accord, we turned round and pursued our way disgustedly back to the cairn.

After this misadventure, which showed the infinite possibilities of going seriously astray, we determined to leave Carn Eige alone on such a day as this, and

stick to the western ridge. Our course was now coincident for some distance with the county march between Ross and Inverness-shire. Ciste Dubh, the Black Cist, was the next peak on the agenda, and after that Carn Coulavie was perhaps feasible. We did, without question, traverse the Black Cist, but whether the next peak we crossed was Carn Coulavie or not we would not too positively aver. Man proposes and the weather disposes in Wester Ross. A mile or so beyond the last point reached, a track crosses the ridge from Glen Cannich, and we took to this as the safest way out of the upper regions of mist and enchantment. There was a smart run downhill, and then, in front, as if a curtain had been drawn up, we saw crags and tumbling burns and a dark sheet of water steaming with mist. All was confused and indistinct, and in a moment the curtain was shaken out again, hiding everything. But what tarn or lochan could it be, we asked ourselves, on the shoulders of this high ridge? We had our answer as we clambered downhill, and the tarn unfolded itself as a great cantle of Loch Affaric, cut off between spurs of the mountain. We had strayed from the track, and were coming down the shoulder to the west of the corrie we had ascended; a break-neck slope lay beneath us, and beyond it a craggy descent to the glen. We had no stomach for rock-climbing, and betook ourselves wherever we could to the tracks of deer, which marked with unfaltering instinct the safest route among the cliffs and gullies.

The two ends of Glen Affaric are an extreme con-

trast. At the Dog Falls the frame-work of the valley is shrouded with trees growing to the tops of the adjoining hills, and the river foams along under birch-boughs that meet overhead. Here the Scotch fir has driven out the birch, and then fallen a victim to the harsh climate of the mountains. Nothing is left but

The bones of desolation's nakedness.

Six miles of steady tramping brought us to Aultbeath, a solitary cottage, where we drank oceans of milk, and would have stayed had it been possible. But we found our resting-place three miles further, at Cambaan, a forester's cottage at the foot of Ben Fhada, a little nest in the arms of great mountains, and the highest house in Ross-shire. We were now within a few miles of Loch Duich, and might have finished our traverse of central Scotland that evening; but we had other designs. We had special motives for wanting to climb Ben Fhada, the Long Mountain of Kintail, or as the guide-books have corrupted it to suit the Saxon palate, Ben Attow. For unfathomable reasons, the old cartographers, and some of recent date, singled it out as the sole representative of the crowd of still loftier Sgurrs and Bens that stand proudly round the head of Loch Duich. They invested it with the purely fanciful height of 4,000 feet, and then pictured it as monarch of the glens from Ben Nevis and Ben Muich Dhui to the extreme north. We would fain inquire into the reasons for this long-established usurpation, and, furthermore, wipe out the disgrace of having tried to reach it a year ago and being foiled by malignant

weather. Cambaan, now a starting-point denied to the tourist, was then the best spot for an ascent, being at the very head of Glen Affaric, and close to the pass of Glen Lichd, which cleaves its way down to the sea between Ben Fhada and the long file of towering peaks that attain their highest in Scour Ouran. Glencoe, Glen Sligachan, the Larig Ghru: no one who knows would hesitate to put these first among the grandest mountain passes in the British Isles. No one who has seen Glen Lichd would hesitate to place it with those three, but might doubt whether to put it first or last. Scooped out by glaciers, trenched and ravaged by powerful torrents, and heaped with debris from Ben Fhada's toppling sides, this grim rent in the mountains is avoided even by the bold tourist who essays the walk through Glen Affaric to the coast, and who is advised by the guide-book to take the gentler track round the far side of Ben Fhada.

Braced by a dip in the snow-fed Fionn burn, we kept close to the county march, which runs a tormented course up crag and round corrie, up to the great dorsal ridge. No incident marked the climb, save the halts necessary to get our wind on a slope so uncompromising. On this southern slope the moisture of the climate is attested by the wealth of flowers, ferns, and mosses, and the superabundance of bogs, starred with the pure white of grass of Parnassus and the tawny gold of bog asphodel, and fragrant with bog-myrtle. Every outcrop of bare rock was hailed as a relief to the prevailing softness. The ridge attained, we looked

over into the ugly, denuded bottom of Glen Grivie, and saw in the distance the nick in the mountains where the Glomach Falls pour down to Glen Elchaig. Then we were promptly swallowed up by the mist. Happily, it was a dry one, and we spread ourselves composedly on the thin turf by the cairn, and waited the event. It was Mac's notion that we should give the weather a chance; I was for getting back home at once, as there was nothing to see.

The change came at the end of considerably more than an hour, during which we had smoked or dozed. First the wind veered. A feeling came over us that something great was about to happen. Then the mist began to take a golden tinge, as at the approach of some miraculous dawn. Ample reward was coming for our patient vigil. The breeze blew more strongly, there was a general lightening. We caught the glancing of a loch far away; and then the dark blue heads of Ceranan, Mam Soul, Carn Eige emerged, strong and massive, but strangely remote across the confusion of misty ridges and invisible glens. We could hardly convince ourselves that we had stood on Mam Soul but one day since, and now were here. Until this instant the very mountain we were on had been a stranger to us; beyond the few square yards of ground beneath our feet, we hardly knew anything of its shape and magnitude. Now we perceived that our summit rose from the brink of a noble corrie, boiling over, at this moment, and steaming to the heavens with dense white columns of mist. Further west, this hollow had

eaten its way into the entrails of the mountain, and the edge above was shattered into a line of pinnacles, faced with unscalable cliffs of slaty schist. The pinnacles descend in steep succession to Loch Duich. But Ben Fhada has another summit—we could see it now—a huge, swelling dome, Ceum na h-Aon, about a mile away. Jumping to our feet, we made for it across the smooth tableland.

We were spectators now of a sublime transformation in the aspect of earth and heaven. One of those finest moments in the life of the mountaineer had come, when it is good to be alive and able to climb, and when it seems that an hour of existence could pay, and amply pay, for weeks of hardship and fruitless climbing. Beneath us and around, white pillars of cloud were rolling up, as it were from depths unfathomable, to the opening sky. Ben Fhada was the one thing motionless amid a world of movement. East, west, and south, sharp edges of mountains, snow-sashed corries, swart precipices, azure breadths of sea, appeared amidst the swift and silent phantasmagoria. Minute by minute, the steadfast ridges, cliffs, and buttresses came out clear; a blue wedge of Loch Duich shone through the window between us and Scour Ouran; and in the gaps of the ridges, peak beyond peak, and range beyond range, came into being. It was like a world re-created out of chaos. The mountains of Glenlg, the almost untrodden mountains of Knoydart, stood out clear and solid; and, across the grey-blue levels of Loch Alsh, we could see the

splintered Coolin of Skye upholding a heaven of stormy cloud-drift. Between us and the nearest range there was a great gulf fixed. Narrow and deep, more than 3,000 feet deep, is Glen Lichd, for the bottom, which we could not see, is not a hundred feet above tide-level. It seemed as if the world ended at the brink of it, and as if another world rose beyond it out of the void. An eagle would not have taken long to fly from the cairn on Ben Fhada to the peak of Scour Ouran ; the distance is less than three miles, but that gives a very imperfect idea of the nearness of Scour Ouran's buttresses thrust out towards Ben Fhada's sides.

In slow succession the bony ribs of the hills grew clear across the gulf, peak after peak freed itself of cloud ; and now we waited for the last of the mists to be blown seaward. Scour Ouran still smoked like a volcano's top, wrapped in a whirl of vapour. At length that also yielded to the breeze ; and now, without a cloud-fleck between, across a space so narrow, we feasted our eyes on the long procession of craggy summits, rising from a range of deep, capacious corries hardly less magnificent.

But on his spirit solemn awe
Fell when, the summit won, he saw
To westward Knoydart peaks up-crowd,
Scarr'd, jagg'd, black-corried—some in cloud,
Some by slant sunbursts glory-kissed—
Beyond, through fleeces broad of mist,
Like splintered spears weird peaks of Skye,
And many an isle he could not name,
That looming into vision came
From ocean's outer mystery.



FROM BEN FHADA ACROSS TO SCOUR OURAN

Photo by Alexander B. Beattie, Elgin.]

We did not descend at once, having no wish to try the strength of our ankles on the formidable slopes below the western summit. For half a mile we kept along a horizontal terrace, one of many that give this side of Ben Fhada an appearance like that of Liathach, over Glen Torridon, with its tier upon tier of gritstone walls. They are the result of incessant landslips, wide tracts of hill-side having slid down, leaving along their upper edges something curiously like a rampart and fosse. The fosse makes excellent covert for getting above the deer, and the stalker whom we were staying with told us that it made also a first-class rifle-pit. Ben Fhada abounds in pasture for deer; few mountains have so much verdure right to their top. We had already come close to three handsome red stags on the plateau. Hinds and fawns were about in plenty. We watched little herds stop feeding and stare up at us, and when they had satisfied their intense curiosity, make off up Glen Lichd. As we went eastward more herds were aroused, until a long cavalcade of hinds and calves, not much less than two hundred, were in motion below us.

It was hours since we had slaked our thirst. The booming of torrents down the opposite slopes, harmonised to a diapason by the resonant hollow of the glen, was tantalising to our ears. But now a new strain came into the symphony, as if the voice of one of these multitudinous streams had become nearer and more articulate. What it meant was soon made plain. We found a spot where, from a cluster of mossy holes, a

full-sized burn came bubbling up, much after the fashion of a limestone brook, and tumbled down the rocks to form a lochan, haunted by deer. It was the best water we ever tasted, and the most beautiful of fountains; we drank of it *pleno flumine*; and thence began our downward course into Glen Lichd, beyond the head of which our shieling lay, a white speck in the infinitude of heights and hollows.

That night the weather had another relapse. We looked out in the morning from our lonely hospice to find all the mountains wiped out by a misty deluge. Must we then descend to the road along Loch Duich, and reach Shiel Inn like commonplace tourists; or should we defy the elements and force a way over the mountains? As we had yesterday picked out a straightforward, if toilsome route, up a huge limb protruding into Glen Lichd from the summit of Scour Ouran, we made up our minds to the braver alternative. Accordingly, we turned down the pass, which we had surveyed last evening from above. Half-way down, the floor of the glen suddenly drops from an upper to a lower story, the lower being nearly at sea-level. Through the gashed and beetling wall between the upper and lower glens, in an almost subterranean gorge, sweeps the Allt Granda, which is, being interpreted, the Ugly-looking Burn, to be precipitated at the end into a seething pool. Below, from the inmost hollows of Scour Ouran, a still more powerful stream issues from Coire Domhain,¹ the

¹ Pronounced Dawn.

Deep Corrie, to unite in the River Croe. All around are scarped buttresses with their ridges in the clouds ; the bellowing of stormy waters re-echoes from every side.

Instead of breasting the steep sides of the limb we had noted, we were led away by a track winding into Coire Domhain. This grew more and more undecipherable ; but, at any rate, we had the burn at our side. Allt a' Coire Domhain is a river, if size is anything to go by ; and with a big spate coming down, its cataracts were a magnificent sight. We had set out to climb Scour Ouran, and, if we had confined ourselves to that object and stuck to the great buttress on our right whose crest runs without a break to the summit, we might have been roughly handled by the weather, but we should doubtless have conquered our peak and got down easily to Glen Shiel on the other side. But a transitory brightening of the weather made us rash. Along the mighty wall of Coire Domhain we saw five peaks ranged in semicircle against the wind-swept sky : they were the peaks of Ben Mhor, the Five Sisters of Kintail. Why be content with one peak, though it were the biggest ? The rain had gone, the mist had gone, and the sky promised everything that was good for the afternoon. So we resolved to strike up the slopes at once and take the whole five. It all looked so simple and easy, but it cost us Scour Ouran.

To pay audible compliments to highland weather is like patting a surly dog, who may retaliate with a snap. Unfortunately, we were not in a position to

look seaward when we prognosticated so surely on the glorious afternoon that was coming. Hardly had we got among the crags and screes at the top before the mists and rain came pouring over the ridges again like the returning tide, urged on by a gale. We met its full impetus as we struggled across Sgurr nan Spainteach and felt our way along the ridge in quest of Sgurr na Ciste Dubh, the next of the grim sisters. Even now we are not able to assert categorically that we did or did not climb this latter peak. Instead of being the simple thing it looked from below, the ridge bristled with projections, which might have been trifling in fine weather but in the mist perplexed us sadly. At one spot an inlet runs in from the northern corrie, with a thin wall of decayed rocks for its boundary, along the top of which we, in our blindness, clambered, taking it for the main ridge. At the end of one of these rotten projections my companion nearly came to grief through the collapse of a flight of ledges. We saw a dark peak looming over us, and up it we went. On the top there was no cairn; and as the aneroid would not be persuaded to indicate much more than 3,000 feet, even allowing for atmospheric convulsions, we assumed, perhaps wrongly, that it could not be Sgurr na Ciste Dubh (3,370 feet), second in height after Scour Ouran. Whatever it was, beyond it the mountain seemed to break off suddenly. On all sides, except the rugged causeway we had come by, there were abrupt and craggy slopes, and we could not

tell whether we were on the main ridge or on a spur, or whether an immediate descent would take us down to Glen Shiel or back into the embraces of Coire Domhain. Still we could distinguish the triumphant roar of Allt a' Coire Domhain above the general din of winds and waters; but for blind men it was an unsafe guide.

We cowered under the streaming rocks for half an hour, hoping vainly for even a momentary lightening of our darkness. The winds were in mad dance around us, eddying about the peaks, buffeting now from this quarter and now from that. Patches of what seemed like denser and darker clouds or drifting smoke flew past now and again. It was the wind striving to tear the veil to pieces, dark breadths of hillside glooming vaguely through the tear, which was instantly mended. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to come down on the wrong side, and we started the descent reluctantly and with much misgiving. Only when we had dropped a thousand feet and were escaping from the mist were we sure of our direction. Had a Swiss guide been there, used to the exquisite clearness of his native atmosphere, he would probably have guessed the height of the Glen Shiel peaks, over against us, as nearly 10,000 feet. The storm-clouds were not so thick on that range as on the summits we had just left; they had that degree of opacity which gives to objects seen through it the maximum of exaggeration. We took the white crown of a waterfall for snow lying near the

tops. But at each step the heights opposite grew higher and higher, and now we could trace the gleaming of a water-course up and up to its source in a black recess thrice as far above the base of the mountain. All was vague, sombre, enormous: cliffs, slopes, and corries blended in one sheer mass of gloom; precipice beyond precipice, towering up immeasurably, like mountains in a dream. Dimmest and furthest loomed the superb Creag na Damh, the Stag's Rock, and the crowning peaks of the Saddle, whence a year ago we had gazed down on black Loch Hourn and the rugged head of Glen Quoich.

Mac was due back at Aberdeen the following night. We went together next morning as far as the Highland Railway, where we parted, he for home, and I to take a day off beside the sea at Plockton. My boots by this time were not exactly new, and my aches and sores had settled down to a certain tenderness, which Mac's vicarious stoicism had disciplined me to disregard. Three more days of climbing and long tramps, including one day of the worst weather among the tops, intervened before I rejoined my family at Findhorn. The night before I reached them, as I was taking my stockings off at the hotel, I felt a leathery object loose in one stocking. My right heel had come off; or, rather, a pad of skin, almost as big and thick as the palm of the hand, had become detached as the result of the blistering. Underneath was a brand-new heel. Mac should have seen that.

Shiel Inn, that ancient and historic hostelry, is

now no more: the autocrats of the deer forest have shut it up, and over a wide area of glen and river, mountain and loch, stretching around it have shut the tourist effectually out. The walk just described would now be impracticable, for by the shortest route it is forty-three miles from Balmacara, now the nearest base, to the next possible halting-place, the temperance hotel at Invercannich. Thus memories are to be treasured of days and nights in that cosy inn, rambles up the sylvan ravine of the Undalain or beautiful Glen Shiel itself, and ridge-walks on the mountains round from Glenelg to the neighbourhood of Clunie Inn. Fisherman's weather set in soon after Mac and I arrived on another occasion, when among the guests was a certain Lord Mayor who, apparently, was a recent apprentice to the angler's craft. The last day of the week came, but there was no hope of a start on the long route through the hills to the railway. But Mac's time was up on Monday evening; so something had to be done.

The angler was jubilant. His spirits went up as ours went down; he had been gloating for days over the fall of the barometer. We spent the morning studying alternative routes; and, after luncheon, in utter boredom, Mac and I and an engineer who was staying there sat down to halfpenny nap, which we played, with intervals for meals, for twelve hours on end. It may as well be confessed, for it was a sin of inadvertence not of intention—we slunk off to bed in the small hours of Sunday morning, and the man

who won most was the engineer. Long before that, however, there was an interlude, the hero of which was the piscatorial Lord Mayor. By dint of perseverance and unflinching exposure to the weather, he landed two fine grilse, which all the guests turned out to admire. Full of elation, he was discussing which of his friends should be the recipients of his spoils, with regret that it was Saturday and delay in the post might be fatal to their arriving fresh, when the gillie dryly observed that the grilse were not trout, but "fush," and consequently belonged to the landlady. This crushing dénouement put an end to his anxieties about the post, and we returned to the card-table not to aggravate his discomfiture.

After our day of sloth and our recklessly late hours, we were not afoot next morning till after ten. It was still raining as we walked between the loch and the skirts of the mountains; and it came down pitilessly when we left Glen Lichd on our right, and turned up a roadless and nameless glen between the hills at the end of Ben Fhada. In front was a welter of mist and rain; but we had to get away somehow, and, after all, this was the right sort of day for seeing waterfalls, and the one fixed item on our programme was the Falls of Glomach, the highest cataract in Scotland; after which our plans were still unsettled.

There is a stream (I name not its name, lest inquisitive tourist Hunt it, and make it a lion, and get it at last into guide-books)

Springing far off from a loch unexplored in the heart of great mountains,
says Clough; but to the ordinary tourist Glomach

Falls are only a name. There is no need to dwell on the drenching we endured, from rain, from soaked heather and fern, and from the flooded burns we had to ford. After a few miles the rain abated, the ground began to fall slightly, and we found ourselves looking into a bare upland glen with a deep rent in the encompassing hills, which was evidently the gorge of the Glomach torrent. As we descended the steep brae, where the track disappears at a leading cairn, allowing the wayfarer to make his own path across the open ground to the river, we began to hear the noise of the falls. First the air was full of a low buzzing sound, which waxed to a mighty thundering as we came near the brink. We had hoped great things of the Falls of Glomach; but we were connoisseurs in waterfalls, which means that we had been often disappointed, and we had not dared to anticipate anything quite so fine. All the falls in the English Lake District put together would hardly surpass the grandeur of this, at any rate, under such conditions as when we saw it. The mass of water sweeps through a narrow gash in the cliffs, and is split in two by a jagged rock in the middle, below which it drops, in one huge torrent of hissing white, into a corner far down, where it is twisted suddenly and hurled sideways, down, down, down, into a deep black pit. No eye has ever seen the whole of the fall, for the rift which it descends in one terrific leap has a skew in it: the lower portion can be seen from below, and I climbed down to a point of rock jutting over the hissing gulf,

to gaze as far down as was possible. But the abyss did not reveal all its secrets. The rock vibrated with the incessant shock, and a few yards apart we could not make each other hear by shouting

On either sides scarped slopes overhang the gorge, forming a little glen, on the sides of which birches, alders, and rowans cling wherever they can find a foothold. Lush masses of bracken, purple heather, and glowing foxglove-spires cover the ground between —a fantastic blending of beauty and savagery. At a height above the raging waters a track creeps round the sides of the glen, a track so narrow and dizzy that it reminded Mac of a certain path in Inverness-shire where, the saying is, if two persons meet, one has to lie down for the other to walk over him. Whilst I was looking back for a last distant view of the tumbling mass of water at the head of the glen, flashing and tossing like a great white plume, my companion called me. He had found the skeleton of a stag on the hillside, a fine animal that had apparently not lain there long, though every bit of flesh had been cleaned off by the hill-foxes and ravens, and many even of the bones were torn away.

We were now in Glen Elchaig, which runs west to the head of Loch Long and the mouth of the River Ling; but the River Elchaig was much too deep to ford. Our faces grew as melancholy as the glen when we realised the awkwardness of our position on the wrong side. There was nothing for it but to push through bog and burn, hugging the river-bank, where

the going was cleaner. Suddenly, I gave a whoop of exultation, for right beneath us, hid in a bend of the gorge, was a bridge, a flimsy, swinging affair, constructed chiefly of galvanised wire and barrel-staves, and not unlike those pictured from the Himalayas; but, as Mercutio said, 'twas enough, it served. We trod gingerly on the swaying laths, and were soon off at a good pace down the road from the deer forest, the glen growing more genial at every mile.

At the first house that we found inhabited—we had passed many that were tenantless—we came across a grey old highlander, whose English was halting, but who knew a good deal about the region at the back of the hills. Our aim was to reach the railway by some route that would enable us to capture a peak or two on the way. Mac put the old man through an elaborate cross-examination; and, with the map spread out on his knees, scored out houses that were no more, and revised the tracks. Many a clachan and solitary farm that the Ordnance Survey knew is now but a larach, the mere stump-end of a house, pitiful memorial of the days ere the highlander was dispossessed. Furthermore, the old system of bridle-ways from glen to glen is now upset, what with the depopulation of the land and the rise of deer forests and lodges, the feeble current of intercourse having ceased, or set in another direction. After a long interrogation, we learned that there was a house some ten miles off, within a few hours' journey of a noble clump of peaks, which are most difficult of access from any other

quarter. We also ascertained that a forester was living there, an important detail, which was corroborated by further inquiries in Killilan, a few scattered houses at the head of Loch Ling. Could we get so far before nightfall? It was worth trying.

Crossing the Ling just above its outlet, Mac pointed to its ample breadth and volume: "We've got to track that river to its source." There were many lions in the path—big burns to be crossed, peat-mosses to be threaded beset with shaky tussocks and quivering sloughs. Naked, sombre, and unutterably dreary, yet not without an entralling majesty in its solitude and dreariness, the glen wound on, deeper and deeper into the gloom of the hills. Only in one or two sheltered nooks were there any trees; the river and a prowling sparrow-hawk were the only live things visible, and for all the long miles to the distant lodge there was but one tiny farmstead to pass, the inmates of which stared at us from the opposite bank as if we were men from the moon. A long way off a great black fell, which we took to be Lurg Mhor, towered above the crowd of stunted hills. Soon it wrapped itself in its robe of mist and settled down for the night, leaving the interminable glen more dull and melancholy than before. "Now we're getting into the heart of things," Mac observed; aye, and we were seeing the bones and skeletons of things, a grim and tragical sight, in all conscience.

But for a stock of bull's-eyes doled out by my companion, we had had next to nothing to eat since the morning, my worthy friend's theory being that all

the sustenance a man in good fettle requires is a good breakfast and the prospect of a good dinner—merely the prospect, which to-day was too dim and visionary to stay our stomachs. But it is not meet to inflict upon the reader all the tedium and weariness of that trying journey. When there was hardly a glimmer of light left in the sky, we made out the shape of a house at the foot of a dark hill; and our hearts sank, for there was no welcoming beam of lamp or fire, and the chimney was smokeless. Nevertheless, someone came at last to the door. It was the forester's wife, and her first words woke us to a fact that had somehow escaped our consciousness. It was the Sabbath. Why were we travelling? I left the answer to my comrade. He humbly explained that it was a case of necessity, and that we were respectable and law-abiding people—and said nothing about playing nap. But the lady continued stern, and the conference was long and doubtful before she at length exclaimed, “Ah weel, if the Lord'll grant it to me this once,” and consented to take us in. Basins of cool, rich milk speedily rendered us first aid; but after that our fare had to be of the simplest, hardly anything better than porridge, though plenty of that. Mac was reprimanded when he produced the map and began to discuss our morrow's route. It was the Sabbath. We had nothing to do but go to bed, which we did in a chastened spirit.

We had a more substantial breakfast next morning, when the pious lady did not refuse a fair recompense for the wound to her conscience. She and her husband

had been in this remote spot five years, they said, and we were the first tourists they had seen. A lonelier dwelling could not be found in all Britain. The glen of the Ling ran on and on among the higher hills, rising slowly to the saddle, where the river begins under the slopes of Sgurr Choinnich, the peak we were bound for. There was a high and solid bridge, and the track had been improved here for the convenience of the sportsmen; but the grim desolation and the indescribable roughness of the ground on every side seemed to forbid all human rights of way. Then, to our intense annoyance, the pony track ended a far cry from the saddle, without any apparent cause or purpose whatever. The miles that ensued to the summit of the pass were our hardest and weariest. We floundered into deep furrows cut by the winter ploughing of the burns; we scrambled along the sides of many a recent landslip, finding it impossible to maintain a straight or level path for half a dozen yards together. We had got among Nature's rubbish-heaps with a vengeance. But what made matters worse, we had walked off our one-inch map twenty hours ago, and the half-inch was a continual worry. Even the Ordnance Survey has its failings with regard to contours, but this map reduced all inequalities to a deceptive smoothness. It was hard to reconcile the theoretical with the actual mileage. Unquestionably, a Ross-shire mile exceeds all others as a measure of physical exertion—about that we were unanimous.

When, at length, we came in sight of the true head

of the pass and saw a rocky cone tapering from the tableland beyond, the weather had another sulky fit, and Sgurr Choinnich greeted us through gathering rain. We were driven soon to take shelter under a fragment of ruined wall, that seemed to be part of the forest march; and, as we contemplated the dark streamers of rain stalking through the glens it was borne in upon us that if we meant not to lose our peaks after all we must climb in defiance of weather.

No cairn marks the highest point of Sgurr Choinnich. Between it and Sgurr a' Chaoruinn, the summit of the whole range, there is a gap five hundred feet deep, the descent of which on our side was rocky, part of the great precipice at the head of the corrie. A cold white mist came rolling through this gap. Eight hundred feet of collar-work took us to the top of Sgurr a' Chaoruinn and we were gratified to find a cairn of such a size and build as made amends for the rival mountain's lack in the one thing that gives a proper finish to a peak. Otherwise, this was a disappointing mountain, its only dignity being due to its position as marking the water-shed of Scotland, the streams to our left running towards Skye and the Atlantic, those to the right seeking the great glens that extend to the North Sea. Over the immensity of earth and sky different kinds of weather were chasing each other with wild rapidity. Moruisg, directly facing us, was now wholly enveloped in floating veils of mist, and now the veils were torn to ribbons and flung adrift on the winds. The mists surged up again and again to the topmost

summits with magical swiftness, and were dissipated just as quickly. They swarmed over Lurg Mhor, giving its void and shapeless mass an indefinable grandeur. We turned again and again to admire the slender pyramid springing from its western shoulder. But all the wreckage of the drifting clouds seemed ultimately to be borne over peak and glen and piled up against the mighty barrier of An Riabhachan, beyond Loch Monar; its far-extended bulk, vaster and even more chaotic than Lurg Mhor, blocked our view of Mam Soul and Carn Eige, the final eminences of these outlandish ranges.

Our fondly-nursed design of bagging a third peak was not smiled on by the destinies: we had to be content with a brace. For the best part of a week we had been free from the tyranny of the time-table; but now, even here, 3,452 feet above sea-level, we were to feel its bondage again. Mac pulled one of these hated documents out of his pocket, and coolly announced that he must catch the six-thirty for Aberdeen. Figuratively, and only figuratively, we came down from the clouds at once. Not merely was Bidein, the third peak, out of our reach, but there was hard work before us to reach Achnashellach station in time. Reach it, however, we did. Mac caught his train at the expense of his tea, for Craig Inn had for twenty years been nothing but a name on the map; and I sought the house of an amenable forester, where I enjoyed a much-needed meal and had my clothes dried, before departing by train and steamer for peaks in the south.



LOOKING DOWN LOCH TORRIDON

V

IN WESTER ROSS

Mysterious Glen Torridon,
What marvels, night and day,
Light, mist, and cloud will be working there
When we are far away!

Principal Shairp wrote that; but a much bigger poet, Swinburne, also went to Torridon, and wrote the most magnificent canticle of all poems describing night and the mountains:

All night long, in the world of sleep,
Skies and waters were soft and deep,
Shadow clothed them, and silence made
Soundless music of dream and shade.

It was with echoes of this in my ears that I crossed the moors from Achnashellach, on another day and during another summer than that of the walk described in the last chapter. Swinburne's "vague miles of moorland road" were from Kinlochewe to Torridon, half-way between which points my route would eventually join his. Two miles before joining it, mine had the advantage of taking in the celebrated view of Ben Eighe from above Coulin Lodge, a view all the more thrilling to me then because I did not know it was celebrated.

Benyea, magnificent Alp,
Blanched bare, and bald, and white,
His forehead, like old sea-eagle's scalp,
Seen athwart the sunset light.

The huge quartzite mountain, crowned with many peaks, came gradually into distinctness through dishevelled cloud as I trudged over the watershed; and finally stood up in all its amplitude above the indented hollow, fledged with dark pines and silver birch, from which Loch Coulin and beyond it Loch Clair shine up like polished mirrors. When first seen, with vast sea-mists passing swiftly over it, now completely hidden and now revealed, it looked unreal, phantasmal, the weirdest and most elusive of mountain shapes. It is not the shape, however, that is so singular, but the colour, white or grey flushing to faint pink. It is like a piece of stately and colossal architecture built out of the fabric of dreams. At length, sky and mountain were swept clear, and above the trees, the glen, and the waters rose Ben Eigne in all its perfect contours, its aerial majesty. There is no ruggedness, no hint of latent terrors, in this face of the mountain; the splintered peaks, the devastated corries, the tremendous precipices are all on the other side. Grace and strength are one in the symmetry of this calm front; the bold, free curves of the long buttresses sweeping up in unbroken lines from the glen, and the flawless arc where the ridge dips low between the summits. One exquisite feature that rivets the eye is a slender sandstone pinnacle crowning the tip of the long spur that sinks towards Torridon.

Coulin Forest is threaded by good roads, but notice-boards warn the mountaineer "to keep off the turf," for we are in one of the regions where the

climber, the tourist, and the misguided lover of nature are classed among the noxious animals, and treated with about as much courtesy as the deer-stealer. A heavier storm was threatening when I struck the road, and it was a godsend to me when the mail-cart trotted up. A mile west of Ben Eighे rises a still more astonishing mountain, most astounding in the prodigious contrast with its neighbour,

Liaguch, rising sheer
From river-bed up to the sky,
Grey courses of masonry, tier on tier,
And pinnacles splintered on high!

Splintered, contorted, and riven
As though from the topmost crown
Some giant plougher his share had driven
In a hundred furrows clean down.

Tryfaen alone among English and Welsh mountains can be compared with its magnificent abruptness; but Liathach is bigger, higher, and steeper than Tryfaen. It hangs over Glen Torridon in four miles of precipices, and ends towards Ben Eighे in a sheer bluff that has been likened to "the stem of some mighty vessel plunging in a tempestuous sea." The front is a steep succession of sandstone terraces, faced with perpendicular cliffs, towering up to the peaks, which are capped with white quartzite. When the mountain came into view, it was bare of mist, except a few clouds swirling round Spidean, the central summit; and the stark, beetling, triple-headed pyramid was an awe-inspiring sight. But a sea of mists came rolling up from Loch Torridon, and broke over Liathach and Ben

Eighe. Both mountains were effaced, and we in the mail-gig pulled our waterproofs tightly round us to meet the onslaught of a furious squall. Then a blast came that rent to pieces the immense robe of mist enwrapping Liathach, and, in a moment, a million fragments of shattered cloud were flying round the black colossus, and through them the giddy tiers of cliff, the cavernous hollows and gullies, and the pinnacled crest, loomed in chaotic grandeur.

We drove into Torridon in another stinging shower; night appeared to be descending on loch and glen before its time. Here, under the threatening sides of Liathach, on a narrow strip between the mountain and the sea, a line of tiny houses cower, among them a few of slightly more comfortable appearance, one of which is the temperance hotel. This modest house of entertainment was once an inn with a licence, of which it was deprived some years ago, not so much in order to coerce the natives into sobriety as to make the place as inhospitable as possible to tourists. Unless it was at the residence of the owner of the forest, I am unable to imagine where Swinburne found "the kindest of shelters" alluded to in his beautiful poem, the geography of which is rather perplexing, although, of course, one must not confound Upper Loch Torridon with the seaward loch. Entering the little hostel, I found myself in a large kitchen, with old-fashioned furniture and a fine open fireplace. Though its glory must have departed with its licence, it still appeared to be the resort of the males of the clan. Two or three

men slouched out, and another came forward and took me in charge as his guest. Soon my drenched clothes were steaming in front of the replenished fire; but it was not until the arrival of a tall highland lassie, who had evidently been fetched in by one of the departed guests, that I was conducted into the other room, a modern one contrasting curiously with the primitive but. Later on I discovered that there was yet another chamber in this compact little mansion, a tiny bedroom wedged into the wall-space between those just described. In what obscure corner of the structure the owners lived was the same difficult question as often embarrasses one in the Highlands. However, I had been in stranger lodgings, and was not in the least inclined to be critical. The kindness of the highland landlady made up for all deficiencies.

At Torridon, with the mountain wall overhanging the roof behind, and the stormy loch before, stretching seaward into a night of tempest, one seems to have come to the end of the habitable world—"a grassless, fruitless, unsustaining shore." Westward lies a shadowy Niflheim, so it seems, of perpetual mist, storm, and darkness. Between the squalls that swiftly followed each other, I made hurried excursions to the front door, to gaze seaward. The mountains of Glenshiel-daig Forest and of Applecross were vague and nebulous as storm-drift, one dim outline behind another, ending in great filmy shadows across the west. Storm pursuing storm up the length of the loch now erased and now intensified their louring shapes. When I went to bed,

the howling of the wind, the dashing of rain on roof and windows, and the roar of waters from Liathach impending over us, a thousand fierce, barbaric voices, sounded in tumultuous chorus, whose mighty compass and immeasurable harmonies wrung the heart for this forlorn home of humanity on the strip of earth between the mountains and the melancholy sea.

Liathach is not a peak for solitary mountaineering, unless the weather be set fair. That night's deluge was tremendous; the boggy land under the precipices was all awash, and the river coming down like a savage beast. Mists hung gloomily overhead, and, when I had given up the mountain as a bad job and caught the mail-gig again, we were chased by showers up the glen. This, the driver assured me, was the normal aspect of a morning in Gairloch; but he said the weather would probably make a decisive change at twelve o'clock sharp, otherwise a still more hopeless afternoon was a dead certainty. On the road were several keepers, who may have been on patrol duty or merely waiting to pass the time of day with the postman, visitors to this secluded region being rare. At all events, to avoid trouble, I thought it best to give these gentlemen a wide berth, for I was determined to climb Ben Eighe; so, when one had been left a mile behind and the next was rounding a bend of the road in front, I seized the opportunity to leave the vehicle, which went on with my belongings to Kinlochewe.

There is a deserted shieling near the spot where I alighted. Sheltering here for a few minutes whilst a

smart shower blew over, I proceeded with the least delay up a stalker's track into Ben Eighe's wide south corrie, a route I had already observed as likely to save time over the ragged moorland under the slopes. The track dies away in the corrie, and from this point my main concern was to avoid the quartzite screees between me and the backbone of the mountain; I had heard a harrowing account of their malignant properties. Soon I was safe in the mist, and through a momentary clearing noticed a green streak running up towards the first peak. Where there was turf, there would be sound footing, so I made for this. A few hundred feet below the crest, I found a stream bubbling out among the stones; and with a forecast of many hours of drought I slaked my thirst abundantly. But there was no escaping those sharp, grinding, slippery screees, till I reached a crumbling rib that ran nearly up to the blade-like ridge of the mountain, which I reached at the end of an hour and a half from the Torridon road. Not many yards away was the summit of Spidean Coire nan Clach, the third highest peak of Ben Eighe.

There was nothing to see. Over the abrupt wall I looked into oceans of mist. The wind drove it along in a thin, piercing rain, and I was glad to shelter behind a ruined quartzite pinnacle, where I waited for a chance to take stock of my position. Hence, when a gust stirred up the misty brew, I had fleeting glimpses of the eastern summit, Sgurr Ban, and the promontory running out to Creag Dubh, over Glen Torridon. Then, as there were no signs of improvement, I made

my way west towards the higher peaks, trusting to the compass for guidance. Here a wide gap almost severs Ben Eighe into two mountains, and I found myself below the flying fringes of the mist, with a clear view into the deep, stony basin of Coire Ruadh-Stac. An exquisite tarn is held aloft on a shelf above the corrie by a broad buttress of quartzite, over which it pours a sparkling waterfall. Even at this distance, the hue of the rock was visible through the translucent waters, which seemed to be flowing over an alabaster pavement.

Beyond the col, I was not long climbing into the mist again; and now, for an hour or two, the task of hitting a safe route kept every faculty on the alert. This western front of Ben Eighe is a huge half-moon, the horns of which, *Sail Mhor* and *Ruadh-Stac Mor*, are the highest points of the mountain. Within the half-moon lies the famous *Coire Mhic Fhearchair*, with a gloomy loch in its bosom, embraced by mural precipices more than a thousand feet high, said to be nearer the perpendicular than any cliffs in Britain not composed of limestone. If you walk along the edge of this, it is impossible to stray, but you may commit mistakes about your position. Coming upon a small, tumbledown cairn, I thought I had found the summit of *Ruadh-Stac Mor*, but soon realised the blunder. Turning west again, therefore, I followed the rim of the corrie towards the other horn of the crescent. It was difficult to appreciate the grandeur of the situation. Only where a casual gully bit into the plateau like the

mouth of a pit, and one looked down through swirling vapours into utter blankness, hearing the boom of torrents from far below resound up this gigantic organ-pipe, was the nature of the place brought home to one's senses. A rough descent and a rougher scramble brought me to the cairn on *Sail Mhor*, where, for a moment, there was a commotion in the air, which let me see the *Burn of the Great Black Corrie* foaming down its long ravine and the sublime prow of *Liathach* cleaving the mists on the farther side. Next moment, the pallid gloom settled down on the world again, having allowed me just time enough to verify my position.

Having made an irrevocable vow to attain the point of highest elevation or founder in the attempt, it now behoved me to retrace my steps and inquire into the actual whereabouts of *Ruadh-Stac Mor*. Returning to the mean-looking cairn, I made a careful calculation with compass and map as to the bearings of the missing peak, and was fortunate enough to hit the col exactly. Once more I found myself below the mist, and beneath its canopy looked down on the dark waters of the loch in the terrific amphitheatre of *Coire Mhic Fhearchair*. Before rising again, the shoulder broadens out; and here, where there was not an inch of shelter, a fiercer storm fell, with a hail of drenching rain. On uphill I struggled against the blast, thinking I could discern the top at every few steps, and still finding it recede. The summit is an enormous mound of shattered rocks, purple and red, as the name implies, with a respectable

cairn on it. There was no doubt now that I had attained the highest point; but I had no desire to stay there. It was long past the destined hour of noon, and, if the postman knew anything about meteorology, the weather was a hopeless failure for the day. Two ways home were feasible: to return over all the peaks and drop down to Kinlochewe at the eastern end of Ben Eighe, or descend directly into the glen at the foot of Ruadh-Stac, and follow it down to Loch Maree. This looked feasible on the map, and I set off downhill without misgiving.

It is not a way to be recommended in bad weather. For hundreds of feet the mountain side is a mass of fragments as big as gravestones, in most unstable equilibrium. Two steps out of every three set a stone wobbling or sliding or tumbling; one's hands come into play, and often it seems best to proceed four-legged, with back to the slope. One big fellow that I trusted to incontinently took a plunge downhill, hustling me along, arm in arm, as it were. Before I realised what was happening, the unruly monster caught against something, and I found myself sitting on the flat side of the stone, which was making frantic efforts to spin round like a top. To cut the story short, I got at last to the bottom of the rubbish heap, climbed down the series of cliffs and terraces below, which are like those on Liathach and by no means a justifiable place for solitary gymnastics, and late in the afternoon arrived at Kinlochewe. My weather-beaten and disreputable appearance gave me apprehensions; but there were

precedents at Kinlochewe of strange phenomena from Ben Eighe, which ensured me admittance.

The next day was fine, and was employed in the capture of Slioch, from which I enjoyed the best view of all this holiday, and in a ten-mile tramp to the railway. It was many years later that I found myself at Torridon again, this time with a New Zealand climber, H. F. von Haast, who was equally intent on doing Liathach. Hardly anything had altered since that evening when the mail-gig brought me here, so many years ago, except that we came in a battered motor-car, and found a few new houses and the old ones still more decayed. Sea and sky, to westward, wore the same sullen, threatening, magnificent look. The temperance hotel had gone, and no other house was disposed to take us in; but we declined to take no for an answer, and eventually prevailed on a lonely widow living in a thatched, two-roomed cottage on a spit of rock running out into Loch Torridon, to give us one room. We foraged for supplies at the tiny store and the one farm-house, and in the end had no reason to regret the temperance hotel. The sea outside the front door was better than any wash-stand. In big storms, like one that raged here the winter before, the projecting spit is almost an island. Big seas break over the roof and against the windows; the thatch was still dented and the kitchen ceiling black in patches where the water had fallen. It was a piteous story the poor woman told us of a night which she passed here cut off from human aid, and the waves threatening to carry

the little tenement bodily away; and, further, of her unavailing petitions to have the roof mended. On the landward side of the spit, in a corner under the rocks, we came accidentally on rows of upturned rocks in what we did not recognise at first for an artificial enclosure. This, we learned, was where the people of Torridon used to worship, in the open air, before a pious landlord built a church, near his big house, two miles down the loch.

During the evening we met the chief forester, whom we had considered the advisability of taking into our confidence, since we had no wish to upset the equanimity of a single red deer if it could be avoided without giving up the mountain. But after studying his physiognomy we came to the conclusion that it would be wiser not to provoke the difference of opinion that would arise if he said that climbing Liathach, whatever precautions we might take, would ruin the prospects for the next shooting-season, whilst we, on our part, were determined to climb it. Next morning accordingly, we said nothing to anybody, and mounted by a gully west of the village, straight for Mullach an Rathain, the western summit. It was a very steep, wind-trying climb; but we were helped, though chilled, by a gale from the sea behind us, and came up at length above the precipices to the bare slopes leading on to the cairn. A strange, ruinous buttress, topped with crazy-looking pinnacles, comes up from the depths on the north to join the main ridge near this; and, when we had clambered



A STORMY DAY, FROM LAITHACH

along the sky-line past the point of intersection and looked over, we realised for the first time that the north face of Liathach is finer in its terrific ruggedness even than the face looking down on Glen Torridon. On the way we were to go, between the Mullach and the main summit, Spidean a' Choire Leith, the crest of the mountain is whittled away to a knife-edge, and the edge is notched into gigantic teeth, the six pinnacles of Am Fasarinen. Their tops are jagged points; but the points stand in a level row, regular as teeth; and on this northern side they are simply the upward projections, equal in height, of a wall-like precipice descending sheer into Coire na Caime. We made our way along this, sometimes astride the jagged blade of the pinnacles, sometimes driven by the violence of the wind to seek a lower path, and finding it in narrow deer-tracks which wound in and out of the gullies and rounded buttresses of the pinnacles, the Torridon road gleaming as a thin white ribbon 3,000 feet below but apparently within easy range of a stone let loose down the headlong slopes and tiers of cliff between us and it.

Spidean rises, beyond the Fasarinen, in a grey cone of quartzite above the dark gritstone walls and ridges. We had fondly cherished the idea of descending at the far end of the mountain, and of crossing the rugged ground between us and Ben Eighe for a look at Coire Mhic Fhearchair from below. All hope of that was suddenly dashed away, and the urgent question stared us in the face, how were we to get off

the mountain? For a storm had come down, all landmarks were blotted out, and we could not tell now whether the dip in the ridge to the north-east marked a possible line of descent or was merely the head of a vertical gully. Von Haast asked the pertinent question, since both sides of the mountain were equally unknown to us, would it not be wiser to try to get down on the home side? We bent our steps in that direction accordingly, and were soon engaged in a complication of cliffs and gullies. To see down very far ahead was impossible; but by sticking to the course of a tiny stream where we could, and by working back towards it when a vertical face compelled a traverse, we found ourselves presently below the worst of the storm, in a wide amphitheatre, two-thirds up the mountain. So far so good; but we knew very well that beyond the floor of the amphitheatre wall after wall, with breakneck slopes between, ran down in formidable tiers to Glen Torridon. Had we not contemplated them with awe from below?

Sure enough, it was steeper than ever beyond that gently sloping floor; but away to our left a wide stream-course had eaten deep into the mountain, and, now on one side and now on the other, there were steep but practicable slopes. The deep cove narrowed into a funnel, and ended at the brink of an open cliff. Along the terrace at the top of this we hunted for a feasible way down, and found it, zig-zagging from ledge to ledge to avoid the sheer drops. These tactics we repeated for many hundreds of feet,

warned by the clatter of waterfalls below us when we were approaching the abrupt edge of the many terraces. At one spot I slipped on the sodden slope, just after we had safely descended an awkward piece of cliff, and felt a sickening blow in the middle of the back, which I put to the credit of a point of rock, till I found that one corner of the camera was badly damaged and two slides warped. My companion met with two slips; but in each case turned a complete somersault in the heather and did not even get a bruise. At all events, we had bagged Liathach at last; and we were far too tired and hungry when we reached home to be very regretful for what we had missed, although a serene evening followed after the storm.

Between those two raids on Glen Torridon date two visits to a part of Ross-shire only twenty miles to the north, but almost as inaccessible from Torridon as if it were at the other end of Scotland. At the first visit, the weather was so awful that Hamish and I did not even see the mountains we had come for until we had given them up in despair and were fifteen miles away. The second was more eventful. An Teallach, or the Challich Hills, at the head of Little Loch Broom, are the most fantastic mountains in contour of any on the British mainland, and among the most difficult of access. Were they situated in Cumberland or Carnarvonshire, and something less than thirty-four miles distant from the nearest railway station, there is no reason to doubt that Dundonnell Hotel, at

the foot of the range, would be a popular climbing centre. But, unfortunately, they are in Scotland, and embrace the sanctuary of a deer forest; wherefore they are taboo to tourist and mountaineer, except during the inclement months of winter and early spring.

Macculloch in 1824 described a visit, and observed that the apparent height of the group, which he calls Kea Cloch, rising as it does from the seashore, "is greater than that of any single mountain in Scotland, excepting perhaps Ben Nevis." He went some way along "the giddy ridge, in the hopes of seeing its termination; but all continued vacant, desolate, silent, dazzling and boundless." He was aghast at the cheerless solitude on the other side: "The sense of emptiness which was produced on looking down into it was absolutely painful: it seemed like standing on the brink of eternity." Pennant, fifty years before, had written, with true eighteenth century nervousness, of "a view where the awful, or rather the horrible, predominates, a chain of rocky mountains, some conoid, but united by links of a height equal to most in north Britain; with sides dark, deep, and precipitous; with summits broken, sharp, serrated, and spiring into all terrific forms; with snowy glaciers lodged in the deep, shaded apertures." We did not believe in the glaciers; but we did accept the reports of two or three parties of modern mountaineers who found An Teallach as sporting as it is picturesque to look at.

Ewen and I—Ewen fell in the attack on Kut at

the head of his company, though it little entered our heads then that we should either of us ever see war, except with ice or precipice—woke on the day before Good Friday to find a south-easter blowing stormily down Strath Beg, cresting the incoming tide on Little Loch Broom, and whisking sheets of snow off the ridges of An Teallach. Since there were only two in the party, both of whom prided ourselves on our caution, we thought it advisable to keep as long as possible under the lee of the northernmost peak, Glas Meall Mor, and followed a stalker's path which zig-zagged up between the nether buttresses and led us quietly and comfortably into the corrie. Here we had to decide whether we would try the rocky north-east buttress, which had been climbed some years ago by another Easter party, or cut our way up the steep slopes to the north-west, where snow and ice gave colour to Pennant's allegation of glaciers. The fallen chunks of hard ice that lay about showed that he might have added avalanches to his list of Alpine phenomena. Whilst we stood deliberating, a herd of deer filed gracefully over the white expanse. And, a moment after, a puff of snow came spinning like a Catherine wheel down the black crags near the top of the mountain, increasing to a violent squall as it came lower, and powdering the rocks with fresh snow-dust. Gusts of updriven snow now came round the western corner as well: our peak was to yield us no shelter after all. Soon we were assailed from both sides by a fierce blizzard.

The buttress and all the neighbouring crags, with their ledges plastered up with snow and the walls smeared with ice, were in a formidable condition; but we found a midway course beside the cliffs, which looked tolerably easy. Easy it was so long as the snow was soft enough for kicking steps; but it speedily grew hard. Ewen went ahead with his ice-axe; and, before we reached the upper crags, put in the pick with vigour and perseเยerance. Progress was slow, and it was chilly waiting for the man at the other end of the rope. Again we thought we might take to the rocks, and I went ahead up a narrow, raking ledge towards a gully. But the gully turned out a deception, and there was nothing for it but a tiresome traverse across the frozen slopes. Another false start was made, and then we did find an irregular gully with broken rocks at the side that could be climbed. An Teallach is composed of Torridon grit, a firm and sound material, but often destitute of anything but the shallowest joints and crannies. Not a hundred feet up we had experience of this paucity of holds. The gully had shrunk to a slight depression between steep buttresses, and everything was smooth up to a projecting corner high overhead. Scrambling on to a small shelf, I made room for Ewen to come and back me up; and then, using the ice-axe in a manner sternly denounced by the best authorities, I hooked it on to the aforesaid corner, surmounted the holdless rocks, and in a few minutes we found ourselves among shattered crags offering a variety of routes.



Photo by J. Rennie.]

AN TEALLACH AT EASTER.

We made for the north-east arête, intent for the time being on finding a place where we could sit and eat our lunch, for we were tired and faint with hunger, though we had barely risen two thousand feet. All at once we found ourselves looking over a ten-foot cornice of solid, frozen snow. Not a ledge was there, not a scrap of shelter, except a handful of rocks sticking up on the verge of the precipice. A tremendous gale swept across, visibly polishing the mass of snow which stood up like a cresting of purest marble, sculptured fantastically by the same powerful graver. Our clothes had long been frozen into creaking armour; our Arctic caps, with the beaver down, were like iron helmets. Crouched in this exposed eyrie, still roped together in case a chance slip or an unexpected gust should send either of us adrift, we devoured our sandwiches with uncommon relish, and afterwards succeeded in getting our pipes alight by means of a cunning arrangement of flamers and fusees. All along the steep line of the arête, the snow was driving up from the corrie like spindrift before a terrific sea. Flakes of ice flew aloft like paper, and whirlwinds forming on the crest went eddying across the mountain, tearing up the snow, and flinging it in clouds into the great north hollow. Feelingly could we appreciate a quaint saying of old Pennant's: "These crags are called Scur-fein, or hills of wine; they rather merit the title of Scur-sbain, or rocks of wind; for here Æolus may be said to make his residence, and be ever employed in fabricating

blasts, squalls, and hurricanes, which he scatters with no sparing hand over the subjacent vales and lochs."

It was a debate whether we were justified in pushing on; but we made our minds up not to abandon the peak until we were actually obliged, and soon we met with our reward. The sun began to peep, stormily withal; the steepness moderated; and at the end of a firm, hard causeway of corniced ridge stood up the cairn of Glas Meall Mor. The outlook towards Gairloch remained blank, but northwards it cleared. Across the Summer Isles and Priest Island we looked toward the dim Hebrides, still in storm and gloom. North, beyond the profound depths and abrupt heights of the nearer glens and mountains, we could see the strange sandstone monsters of western Sutherland, mountains, says Macculloch, "which seem as if they had tumbled down from the clouds:" Coulbeg, like a couchant beast with an enormous head; Coulmore overtopping him behind; and, further away, Suilven seen broadside on and showing nothing of his characteristic Matterhorn shape; Canisp, Quinag, and the rest of them in the far distance. Grander in mass and proportion was Ben More of Assynt's group of bulky peaks, striped with long snow-gullies; and, far towards the borders of Caithness, the cone of Ben Clibrig, most northerly of the greater Scottish peaks.

The backbone of An Teallach runs north and south, and on it are eight peaks rising more than three thousand feet above sea-level. On the east side of this backbone gape two enormous corries, fifteen hundred

feet deep, separated by a ridge extending at right angles from the highest point of all, Bidein a' Għlas Thuill (3,483 feet). We were standing, or rather crouching, on the brink of Coire a' Għlas Thuill, the northern member of this double cirque, looking across at Bidein, a sharp spike crowning a pyramid, and at the long eastern ridge, pinnacle after pinnacle, towering up from precipices scored with long snow-lined gullies. Behind these peeped up the serrated comb of Corrag Buidhe, crowning the still more majestic cliffs of Coire Toll an Lochain, the other great hollow, which we were yet to see. But we agreed that we had never set eyes on anything in Britain, except perhaps in Skye, so wild and bizarre; and Skye itself was not so forbidding.

We corrected the aneroid which had dropped considerably during the storm, followed the ridge over the nameless peak at the head of the corrie, and so reached the col. Bidein was only six hundred feet above us; but to the south the lift was full again of stormy vapour like smoke, and another blizzard was obviously approaching. We could not resist the temptation, however, and pushed on. Keeping not far from the cliff-top, which was like the edge of Lliwedd on a larger scale, we kicked or cut steps up the hard snow, and, scrambling over some exposed sandstone terraces, reached the peak just as the fury of the storm burst over. For a while we lay low under the cairn. Even amid the storm, the glistening snows of the far west peak, Sgurr Creag an Eich, showed through the mist

and sleet, not like anything substantial, but as a mass of diffused light. That too, anon, was swallowed up by the blizzard; and, when we turned home again, our only sure guide was the perilous ridge of Bidein, which we hugged warily, taking care not to trespass on the cornice.

More fresh snow had fallen in this last bout than we were aware of. Our steps were quite obliterated, and the hard snow or ice was covered with a slippery sheet in places. One long, straight piece appeared a safe glissade, and Ewen started gently off. Scarce had he gone ten feet, when I saw him shooting away like a rocket and next moment flying head-foremost down the slope. He had all but disappeared in the mist when I saw him pick himself up, and apparently proceed to inspect his injuries. But he yelled to me that he was all right, and I began with renewed caution to cut steps across the slope. Just at the spot where he slipped the snow changed to hard ice. None the better for my friend's example, I lost my footing, in the very act of hewing out a step, and instantly was shooting down to rejoin him. "All right; I'll stop you," he yelled; but it was a bunch of rocks that caught me instead, and adorned my shins with a handsome pair of bruises. The camera seemed to have escaped damage; but we found, on development, that a series of magnificent views of An Teallach had been taken one over another on a single film. Ewen was unhurt. Cautious henceforward with every patch of ice we came to, we got back to the col, skirted the unnamed

peak, and dropped by a roundabout way to the bealach or pass below our first summit. Deep snow made the going tedious; but in the course of time we emerged from the region of snow into the region of rain, regained the welcome zigzags of the stalker's track, and descended soberly to the glen.

It was without doubt the wintriest Easter we could remember. Good Friday was a day of wrath on the mountains, and we gladly accepted the landlord's offer to be our guide up Strath Beg, and to show us the strange chasm known as the Gully, or, after a neighbouring farm, Corriehallie. Ross-shire contains more fine waterfalls than any other county, and in our drive over from Garve we had seen, not for the first time, the incomparable falls of Measach at Braemore, where the River Broom plunges into the bowels of a canyon so deep and narrow that it is lost to sight in sheer darkness. The ravine at Corriehallie is only eighty or a hundred feet deep; but the narrowness is such that stones only two feet long are wedged across. Standing on a railless wooden bridge, one looks down between crooked, water-worn walls, to the spinning pools and shrieking, headlong current of the infuriated river, visible by glimpses in the blackness. Deer sometimes fall into this horrible place, so we were told, but never reach the loch; their bones are ground up in the tremendous watermill. Far overhead, the peaks of An Teallach, whenever they strode into view out of the mist and sleet, were like Alpine snow-peaks. But the glen was full of colour. Young shoots, ready for

spring, covered the birches with a bloom almost like that of August heather ; the rocks were of a primeval red, hoary with lichen, or jet-black with flowing water ; the bracken was a splendid russet ; and, amid the leafless birches and larches, the pines in their fresh green towered magnificently like cones of malachite. Strath Beg is walled on the north by lofty crags, their top a thousand feet above the stream. Here and there are breaches and gullies, down which a sure-footed hillman might pick a way. But a few weeks before, a shepherd making for one of these gaps on a misty day came over the precipice above the mansion and was dashed to pieces.

All day the storm raged over Little Loch Broom, the surface of which was grey with surf and spindrift. The schooner that visits this remote corner of the world three times a year was almost driven from her moorings. But on Easter Eve, though the weather continued very turbulent, sky and mountains were clear, leaving us no excuse for another day of sloth. We had explored the northern ridge of An Teallach, but the southern end of the range was to us still virgin soil. We therefore took the bridle-path that climbs out of Strath Beg near Corriehallie, and reaching the moorland struck across it towards Toll an Lochain, the greater of the two eastern cirques. Down here it was thawing, and the moor was as wet as a moor could be ; but aloft on the ridges we could see little clouds flitting along, some white, some black, the white ones clouds of drifting snow, the black squalls of fresh snow or rain.

Rising steadily, we came at length to a tract where there was less bog and much bare rock; and then, to our surprise, the ground broke away right under our noses, and between us and the base of the peaks we saw a deep, capacious hollow, traversed by many burns, and walled in on our side by a continuous rampart of cliff some three hundred feet high. Here the mighty platform of primitive gneiss supporting An Teallach is abruptly fractured, leaving this space, as if for a more impressive foreground to the array of peaks beyond it. We followed the edge of the unexpected obstacle to where it gave upon the base of Sail Liath, the southernmost peak; and now we had to choose between two possible routes up the mountain. With a powerful gale blowing steadily from the south and the sun playing on the same side, there was reason to expect that the other face of An Teallach would be comparatively free from snow. On the other hand, to our right smooth spotless sheets extended without a break almost to the summit. Below here the snow was soft; we could kick good steps in it. That path looked seductively easy. But I am afraid it was a sneaking desire to be out of the stinging, staggering blast that tempted us, against our better judgment, to hazard all on this route. It led us aslant up the slopes overlooking the brink of Loch Toll an Lochain. Beneath us when we started there was a smooth hundred feet of snow, down which we might have glissaded and shot over a buttress a few hundred feet high. The higher we went, the steeper and longer

grew the potential slide; and near the top there was a thousand feet precipice waiting at the end of it. And the wind followed us into the great bay in the mountains, brushing up every superfluous grain of snow in a savage fashion, as if to give a broad hint that we should be brushed off without ceremony if we were fools enough to lose our footing.

It was doubtful whether we had chosen the easiest way after all. The snow higher up grew compact and hard, and there were hundreds of steps to be cut before we should reach bare rock. With ice-axes driven in as far as they would go, we crouched down whilst the fiercer gusts shrieked over, stinging our cheeks with their frosty small-shot. And that appalling slide stretched to the verge of the abyss below, a constant reminder that we could not afford to linger. At last, with limbs aching, we crawled on to a scree-patch, and made our way on all fours through a gap in the snow-cornice. The wind met us with paralysing force. As quickly as we could we got away from the edge, and crept over easy rocks to the summit.

The morning had been fine, in spite of the wind; but now a storm was evidently brewing over the hills about Loch Maree. We had enjoyed excellent views whenever we had had time to attend to them. The range of Ben Dearg, to the east, and the wilderness of the Fannichs, formed one long procession of vast, white, luminous domes and ridges plumed with incessant snow-flurries, all swept by sunlit volumes of cumulus from which they were hardly distinguishable.

LOCH TOLL AN LOCHAIN

Photo by William Douglas.]



The hollows beneath were filled with the ethereal blue of snow in shadow, save where scarped buttresses displayed their gaunt nakedness. Broken ends of mountain, pit-like gorges, and crag-walled glens, whose depths of shadow made them seem bottomless, made up a world of tumultuous forms, amid which the eye sought in vain one spot of level ground that would give some sense of rest and stability.

But we were magnetised more powerfully by the view of our own peaks, from this coign of vantage on the very edge of the dark gulf in which lies Loch Toll an Lochain. The gloomy lake was immediately beneath us, in a sort of crater, the sides of which, grim as Avernus, rose from the water's edge in cliff above cliff to the icy pinnacles and black rock-fangs of An Teallach. It was half frozen over, and the inky waters of the other half were breaking, before the gale, into lines of foam that at this height were like tiny ripples. The dominating feature of this extraordinary view is the bristling comb of Corrag Buidhe, perhaps the most astonishing outline in all the Highlands, which towered into the sky, so it seemed, but a stone's throw away, across the head of a gully that breaks the main ridge, its threatening rock-towers defended by a slippery glacier of hard snow. Ewen, whose knowledge of snow-craft was far superior to mine, said it was madness to think now of carrying out our plan of traversing the crest of the ridge to Sgurr Fiona and Bidein. Any hesitation was speedily cut short by the final and unmistakable approach of the storm, whose progress

we had been watching anxiously for the last half-hour. We had already taken several photographs of the near and the distant peaks, blissfully unaware that the camera had been rendered useless by the tumble on Bidein two days ago. Now we saw the mountain across the glen beheaded by the advancing storm, and a moment later the cloud-wrack was catching in the higher pinnacles of An Teallach. We turned tail at once, eager to reach a lower level before the storm was right upon us.

Needless to say, we kept on the windward side going down, and were back at the foot of Sail Liath in a fraction of the time we had taken in cutting up the snow-slopes. One digression from the shortest way home we could not forgo, a peep into the heart of Coire Toll an Lochain. The storm was now right overhead. The immense hollow was already full of flying flakes, which partly obscured yet made it seem the more immense. In the howl of the tempest, the perpetual noise of waters was hushed. High and immeasurably remote glimmered the white peaks, piercing like frail spires of ice into the rushing darkness that filled the upper quarters of the heavens and swooped down in ferocious gusts across the tiers of precipice. They grew dimmer and dimmer, till at last the storm reigned victorious, and the lake's majestic environment faded away like a vision in the all-embracing snow.

VI

FOOTING IT IN SKYE

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

—STEVENSON.

SINCE the date of my earliest rambles in the Isle of Skye, extension of the two rival highland railways has brought the island nearer to London, almost, but not quite as near in time and cost of travel as Switzerland; yet the Coolin Hills are less accessible than almost any group of mountains occupying a similar area in the Alps. The reason is that there is only one hotel in the neighbourhood of the Coolin, and this stands at a distance from the outside corner, with only a few peaks, Sgurr nan Gillean and its immediate neighbours, within the compass of a reasonable day's walk. To climb a score of others the only expedient is to camp out, unless the climbing party is lucky enough to find sleeping quarters in the odd house or two on the skirts of the range. Camping is undoubtedly the best way over the difficulty; but the camp must be proof against fearful weather; and, as experiment has proved, tents are better discarded for wooden huts. To convey your camp to the heart of the Coolin, and then to

procure a supply of provisions, is no small undertaking. An enthusiastic friend actually built a movable hut for this purpose some years since; but the obstacles proved so discouraging that it has never gone further north than his lawn, where he occasionally sleeps in it, and dreams of the delightful hardships and privations of camping in Skye.

It was evening when I first landed in Skye; I was alone, Hamish having gone to Portree for a day or two's rest, and a walk of a dozen miles was before me to an uncertain destination. Leaving Broadford and crossing a dreary moor, with only two morsels of interest to break the monotony, a lochan almost paved with white water-lilies in full bloom, and the ruined church and graveyard of Kilchrist, I came down to the sea again at the town, as the inhabitants dignify it, of Torrin, a town of one story, for the houses are almost all peat-built cots, a good deal less substantial than an average English cow-shed. Here the ocean sends an arm up among the mountains, and the ferrymen, who are almost as plentiful as taxi-drivers in Pall Mall, although fares must be scarcer here than kilted highlanders there, have you completely at their mercy. For it is hard indeed to hit upon the fair rate of exchange between the effort of walking right round the head of the loch and the toil of pulling you a couple of hundred yards across. But the fishermen who take you over are so poverty-stricken that you have a perceptible feeling of gratification in being over-charged.

All semblance of a road vanishes at Kilmaree, a

score or so of cottages and turf-roofed shielings sown at random near a big stone house belonging to the owner of the deer forest. A Skye village has no middle class. There is the mansion, as it is called in the Highlands, whether modest or palatial in character, and there is the poor man's house, which is a byre ; nothing between. In those days there was, however, a comfortable farm-house at Camasunary, a few miles farther across the moor ; and there I hoped fervently to be able to beg or hire a lodging for the night. If I failed, the future looked dark indeed, as Sligachan was a half-day's march away, Broadford hopelessly in the rear, and Torrin or Kilmaree could hardly furnish a more attractive bed than the heather. Day was going apace. When the Coolin came into view, they were mountains of shadow, black against the sunset ; yet they were edged with glory, for a thin vest of cloud enwrapped them, moulded close upon their rugged and distorted shapes. Light suffused this magic envelope, and changed it into a dazzling halo of purple and gold, contrasting inconceivably with the sable of their central gloom.

Camasunary, which is a classic spot to readers of Alexander Smith's "*Summer in Skye*," stands at the head of a bay that is an indentation of Loch Scavaig, with the Atlantic before it, and the mountains circling round behind. The yard in front of the house was a busy scene, for four hundred sheep were being fleeced by twenty shearers, who stared in wonderment when I walked into the garth with my rucksack on, and

evidently took me for some queer sort of pedlar. With the old-fashioned kindness of the highlander whose privileges of hospitality had not yet been curtailed by the iron rule of the deer forester, the head shepherd and his wife agreed to take me in. My first act on obtaining this respite from anxiety was to borrow a towel and run down to the shore, hot and perspiring as I was with the exertion of chasing that elusive quarry, a bed. A shepherd of six-feet-three, who was in all probability a pious man, but had certainly not risen beyond goodliness in the scale of virtues, entreated me not to do anything so foolhardy as to bathe while I was in such a heated state. Much to his distress, I persisted in my folly, and survived the perilous ablution. He wanted to know what was my object in travelling in such a place as Skye, whether I was selling or advertising anything, or whether I was a surveyor. The talk going on meanwhile in Gaelic indicated that I was an object of intense interest, if not of suspicion, to the rest of the shepherds.

It was the longest day of the year, and, when I went to bed long after eleven, the peaked and pinnacled Isle of Rum, rising out of the sea fifteen miles away, was a clear and ineffable vision along the horizon: when I looked out in the morning, Rum was not there; yet all seemed clear up to the sea-line, the haze that hid the island being too faint to be visible except in its effects. My stalwart friend, the shepherd, was once more alarmed for my safety when I mentioned that I proposed to reach Loch Coruisk by way of the shore,

which involved crossing the so-called Bad Step. This is a scramble along the edges of a rent in a series of smooth slabs above Loch Scavaig. The eighteenth-century globe-trotters refer to it with dread, but a novice in the art of rock-climbing would make light of such an obstacle. The highlander assured me that I should infallibly be drowned if I did not give up the rash enterprise; and, as I never went back to relieve his anxiety, he may have thought his prophecy fulfilled.

Seen in garish sunshine, Coruisk was by no means so tremendous or sublime as I had been taught to expect, by the romantic descriptions of Sir Walter and the extravagant prose of his friend Macculloch, who applies to its scenery such well-worn lines as

Per domos Ditis et inania regna.

Like Glencoe, to realise one's dreams, it has to be viewed under louring skies, with a crown of gloom on the dark frontlet of the Coolin. Ravens and sea-birds were screaming among the crags, and their clamour followed me all the way up to the saddle, whence I descended past the mouth of Harta Corrie into Glen Sligachan. This walk over Drumhain and through the glen is one of the roughest tracks in these islands, the ground continually broken and beset with razor-like ridges and splinters of gabbro or basalt. Some years later a Frenchman who landed from the steamer one Thursday at Scavaig asked me the way to Sligachan. His spruce kid boots looked as if they

would not survive three hundred yards of it, and I implored him to stay aboard as far as Portree, and then drive up. But when I caught the last glimpse of him he had started boldly off on the stiffest eight miles he had probably ever set foot on. His arrival at Sligachan, if he ever got there, must have been a sight worth seeing.

Since those days, Camasunary has ceased to be a convenient hospice for mountaineers, which is a serious loss, for there is no other inhabited spot on this side of the Coolin. So difficult is it to approach the southern peaks that a friend of mine actually took lodgings one summer on the little island of Soay, west of Loch Scavaig, and was landed each morning by boat at the foot of the mountains. He suffered considerable privations, and wrote to me that there was not a potato on the island, and butcher's meat was almost unknown. There is, perhaps, more inducement to bivouac in Skye than to undertake the all-absorbing business of camping out, especially if there be any truth in the legend preserved by Macculloch:

“Here also it is esteemed that he who sleeps on the top of the Cuchullin will awake a poet; so widely diffused is the tale of the ‘bicipiti somniasse Parnasso.’ Be he who he may, he will arise a greater poet than Homer, or even than Ossian or the Laureate; for never yet was the summit scaled, even by the goats; unless that should have happened when they disappear once in the twenty-four hours to get their beards combed, as we are told, by the devil. The upper

peaks are mere rocks, and with acclivities so steep and smooth as to render all access impossible."

We found one man at Sligachan who had recently spent a night on Sgurr Dearg, to see the sun rise; but he showed no signs of poetic afflatus, except such as might have marked him a votary of the Celtic rival to Bacchus—

*Bacchum in remotis carmina rupibus
Vidi docentem.*

The interesting point in Macculloch's saying is his deep conviction of the total inaccessibility of the Coolin summits. As a matter of fact, a number of these redoubtable spikes of gabbro were never conquered by man till a time late in the nineteenth century when nearly all the Alpine giants had fallen.

Dropping in at Camasunary for milk and scones, a few years later, a party of us were amused at the report of what befell two youthful mountaineers, whom we knew, but who had kept their adventures in Skye wrapped in mystery. They had arrived at the old farmstead, already transformed into a stalker's house, very late at night, hungry and dead beat. As it was impossible for them to cross to Sligachan in the dark, the goodwife did not refuse to take them in, despite the prohibition against entertaining tourists. The house happened to be in the hands of the painters, who had come from Glasgow to do up all the buildings attached to the deer forest; and most of the furniture had been turned out into the yard. But a bed was

made up on the floor, in the midst of paint-pots and buckets of whitewash, and next day our adventurers set off for the Coolin. On the western skirts of the hills, within reach of the peaks remotest from Sligachan, they managed to get put up for two nights at a shepherd's cottage. Although the region is so far from being densely populated, this could not be said of the shake-down it was their fortune to occupy at the shepherd's. One of the pair had the good luck to be insect-proof; but the other, so it was rumoured, barely escaped with his life. On their departure, they asked the lady of the house how much they owed. She, of course, preferred to leave the question to their generosity. As they still, very unwarily, pressed her to name a sum, she considered, and said that the gentleman who had lodged with her last had also stayed two nights, and paid five pounds a night. The young men were taken aback at this, and after some discussion a more acceptable figure was arrived at. It might at first be imagined that the good dame was treating her guests with a story of a cock and a bull. This would be doing her an injustice. The gentleman referred to had actually paid the ten pounds. She had merely omitted certain not irrelevant facts. This open-handed lodger had met with a serious accident on the hills, and was picked up by the shepherd, whose wife nursed him until it was possible to remove him to Sligachan. On leaving, he naturally paid her a suitable reward, which the unsophisticated woman would fain have made a precedent.

On another visit to Skye, I was benighted with three others at the primitive village of Kilmaree, and enjoyed the experience of sleeping in a crofter's house. The crofter was a poor woman of sixty, who had little English, but with such as she had was painfully anxious to acquaint us with the exact monetary value of every article, from eggs and scones, to clean sheets and candles, with which she supplied our needs. The lodgers she had met with heretofore must have been a close-fisted race, to judge from her pathetic endeavours to treat us fairly, and yet be sure that she obtained her legitimate profit. Needless to say, we did not argue the point very closely: if there is ever any consolation for being the loser in a bargain, it is when the bargain is with a poor lone woman of Skye. Her house might have looked pretty in a picture by Landseer; but it was a queer place for two brace of mountaineers to be quartered in, and one of those a very lengthy pair. The whole structure comprised two rooms, a but and a ben. The latter was mainly occupied by a large wooden erection, divided into two equal compartments. This formed a double bedstead, in which we lay with our feet against the match-board partition between, which was so thin that we felt every movement of the tall pair stretched—or rather compressed—in the other bed. Perfect ventilation was secured by leaving the front door open, with the incidental result that a bevy of ducks invaded the room next morning before we were up. Our wash-hand basin was the sea, whose rhythmic beating also lulled

us to sleep, and mitigated somewhat the discomforts of our outlandish bower. The ducks, at all events, were the only evil beasts that disturbed us; the little house was scrupulously clean, and it was our own fault that the ducks got in. Where the old lady slept was a mystery, the but or kitchen not having a shred of furniture more commodious than a stool.

When Hamish and I started from Sligachan Inn one July morning for Sgurr nan Gillean, we were but novices in the art of rock-climbing, and our knowledge of the Coolin and of the peculiarities of gabbro consisted merely of book-learning without an ounce of experience. We were, in short, innocents abroad; and we committed most of the blunders that ought, by the logic of events, to have ensured failure if not worse. To begin with, our plan of campaign was vague. Hamish was still out of sorts, and suspected me of wanting to lure him up the Pinnacle Route, the most sporting of the three ways up Sgurr nan Gillean; though we had compromised between that and the tourist route by finding out all we could about Nicolson's Chimney, an easy passage on to the west ridge. This would save us the ignominy of following in the footsteps of the common herd—if the few tourists who do ever venture up the mountain can be described as a herd. To keep temptation at arm's length, he had insisted on our leaving the rope behind, unmindful of the fact that one never can tell what emergencies may arise on a rock mountain calling for the aid of a rope. But the chief difficulty in my own mind was that we



THE PINNACLE RIDGE

Photo by F. Hard.

were far from sure of the exact locality of Nicolson's Chimney, and our knowledge of the mountain's general topography was extremely hazy. The Scottish Mountaineering Club had not yet published the admirable large-scale map that is now the mainstay of every climber, and the map we had was small, lacking in detail, and probably incorrect.

Anyhow, it was a fine day, and we felt few misgivings as we climbed up the edge of the Bhasteir Gorge, down which the stream from the corrie of the same name takes its short cut to join the Red Burn. In due time we took our last drink of the pellucid water, once more moistened the bracken in the crown of our hats, for it was hot though overcast, and struck across the wilderness of solid gabbro and coarse scree that stretches from the pinnacles down to the torrent. Of all views of the Pinnacle Ridge this is the finest. From Glen Sligachan, on the other side, the central sgurr seems more tapering, and its attendant spires have more the semblance of Gothic towers soaring up towards one graceful, dominant pile; but on this side the range of precipices, cleft by gullies into five mighty blocks, presents to the eye a more massive and stately piece of mountain architecture. There are not many places on this side where the ridge is accessible. The tiers of cliff are for the most part sheer, and the gullies have insurmountable pitches, while the nose of the ridge looks a very intimidating feature. But when we saw the famous climb at close quarters, the elementary instincts of the mountaineer had their revenge, and we

regretted that the one thing which would have put the Pinnacle Route even now within our reach, that seducing thing, the rope, had been left at the hotel.

Without it, there was nothing to do but proceed along the base of the cliffs towards the west ridge and the easy chimney, unless something within our capabilities occurred midway. We passed a big patch of snow in the recess between the third and fourth pinnacles. Then, clambering along the steep beds of debris, we came suddenly on a gully that appeared to run very near to the summit. Standing in the midst of towering crags the configuration of which was very hazily apparent, we jumped to the conclusion that we had found the cleft between Knight's Pinnacle and Sgurr nan Gillean ; and we congratulated ourselves on hitting upon a route that would give a sporting climb without entangling us in the mazes of Bhasteir Corrie. The change to solid rock was welcome after the shifting scree. We made rapid progress up a considerable extent of gully-bed, and then found the slabs becoming smooth and holdless. Casual notches in the right wall helped us on, but offered no convenient way out to the face. At a spot that was certainly not meant for a resting-place, I was sent forward twenty feet to see what it was like above. This was the toughest bit in the gully, though its hazards would have been but pleasant diversions for a party duly roped. A peep between one's legs revealed the yawning gulf of the Bhasteir stream many hundreds of feet below, and the few stones that were dislodged fell with disquieting rattle

out of sight towards it. But a roomy shelf opened out from the head of the pitch, and in a few minutes I was sitting in safety listening to scraps of apostrophe, mingled with the scraping of my comrade's hobnailers on the smooth sides of the gully. At length his head came round the corner, much to my relief, though it brought some candid remarks on my abilities as a guide, which I accepted with resignation. Hamish had already confided to me his testamentary dispositions and a touching farewell to his wife, in case I returned alone from the expedition, and proposed that we should exchange watches, so that whichever survived should not be without a suitable memento of our last climb together.

From our resting-place on the shelf, we zigzagged up the broken face of the cliff to a nearly vertical wall, where we took to the corner buttress, a rock-tower that looked fearsome, but was prodigal in trustworthy holds. We had got near the top when our attention was attracted by a rocky pile reared high above us to the right of a wide gap. What on earth could it be? Instantaneously with the question I had a dreadful shock. We had blundered from beginning to end. We were not on the main peak of Sgurr nan Gillean at all, but had inadvertently climbed a gully on the outer face of Knight's Pinnacle. Between us and the summit of the mountain gaped a broad and perhaps impassable rift. We retraced our steps forthwith, and looked about us. This face of Knight's Pinnacle is one of the biggest open cliffs on the mountain. To

reach the window between the two peaks the best way appeared to be a narrow shelf or rake which crosses the cliff obliquely. We climbed down and traversed this with care, especially where its continuity was broken by a projecting rock calling for some awkward bodily contortions. Once in the gap, we had no difficulty in following the marks of human hobnails up the main peak to the colossal chunk of gabbro that forms the summit, realising all the way that if we had only taken the Pinnacle Route from the beginning we should have avoided several nasty moments. Anyhow, we had had a good climb, one fresh to us if not an absolutely new one, and also a far superior climb to the one we thought we were doing, up the gully between the two peaks. That, as I found many years later, is not difficult, but very wet and unpleasant, and also dangerous from loose stones.

We descended from the cairn by the first few hundred feet of the easy way, and then dropped on to the scree on the other side of the pinnacles, meeting with three distinct scrambles of very fair quality on the way down, including a chimney about a hundred feet long through the heart of a fine boss visible from Glen Sligachan. Instead of bearing leftwards to avoid the river, Hamish managed to cross at some convenient spot that I missed, so that after watching him reach the track on the far side whilst I was struggling with peat-hags in the bottom, I was reduced to the abject ruse of shouting out an invitation to bathe. It proved irresistible. A broad, deep pool lay

between us, into which, hot with the rapid descent, we enjoyed a refreshing plunge. To convey my clothes across at the head of the pool was an easy matter, and a quiet saunter brought us back to the hotel.

Hamish was my comrade on Sgurr nan Gillean again two years later, and there were two others in the party. As one of these gentlemen was a mountaineer who professed to despise rock-work, and the other a novice, this was no addition to our strength. The day was superb, and the first glimpse of the Sgurr, as we came up the glen from Camasunary and the topmost pinnacle jutted out of the sky over the interposing heights, fired everyone with expectation. How near it looked, and what a trudge we had before we stood at the base of the pinnacles early in the afternoon! A fine cliff marks the end of the ridge, and on it any kind and quality of scrambling may be discovered; but as a steep but safe route lay plain before us to the top of the second pinnacle, I firmly resisted every request to uncoil the rope. Consequently, all moving together, we were at the foot of the third pinnacle in reasonable time; there to tie up was only prudent, but from that point the retarding effect of having four men on the rope began to be evident.

Pinnacle number three is a more formidable crag than the two nethermost. A flank movement is expedient to begin with, along a horizontal shelf in the cliff overhanging Bhasteir Corrie, until an inviting

passage to higher regions presents itself. The position of honour falls to my companion of two years ago, who brings up the rear and the rucksack, whilst the less onerous duty of leading falls to me. The rocks are broken into all conceivable shapes, and there is no lack of holds; but what with wayside debate and other diversion we are a long time in attaining the crest; and then our memory of instructions in the Sligachan climbing-book has to be refreshed to determine how and where this most unsymmetrical cone is to be descended. The actual end overhangs. We go back on our traces for a few yards, then climb along the west side until we are overlooking the deep gully between ours and the fourth pinnacle, Knight's. A tributary chimney drops into this near the head. Sliding down with caution over a slab, we let ourselves over into this chimney, which then gives easy access to the gap. The hindmost man, saddled with the rucksack, finds the drop on to the steep floor a critical thing, and has to be fielded with caution for fear of his shooting out into the gully. Then a nice little descent, with our backs to the rock, leads on to a spot where we can cross to the foot of the next ascent, up the front of Knight's Pinnacle.

This is our old friend of the case of mistaken identity; but we shall not touch the line of our earlier climb, which was far away west, where the crag is more precipitous. Though it is warm work going uphill, the ascent is easy; but when we stand at the top and look over into space it is plain that the next

descent is several degrees steeper than the last, in spite of the overhang at the beginning of the latter. No ledge of any size or shape appears on the beetling cliff underneath until the eye alights on the embrasure between the last two peaks. Nevertheless, we repeat our former tactics, and the difficulties melt away. I descend on the Bhasteir side as far as the rope permits, and while waiting for the next man notice a slab on my right with nail-marks on it slightly ascending. This slab is the key to the situation. Divers small but sufficient hand-holds appear beyond, on a face, it is true, that is practically vertical; and by two or three long zigzags, in the course of which we pass several times under each other's hobnails, we attain a comfortable corner within easy reach of the embrasure.

Now we are on familiar ground. At half-past seven, some hours later than we had bargained for, we stand on the summit. All the way up, the ridge abounds in the most thrilling delights of rock-climbing. You are on a narrow crest with precipices breaking away on either side at the distance of a few feet; you are in mid-air, so to speak; the eye glances instantaneously from the rugged cliff-top to the hazy gulfs, dwarfed heights, and distant scree-slopes in the corrie, which are yet literally within a stone's throw. Before you are aware of any change there has risen around you a gigantic landscape. Over the shoulders of Marsco and his granite brethren you look into the stony wilderness of the Red Hills, which sinks lower as the belting sea rises. Then,

beyond Loch Alsh, the Torridon hills emerge, and south of them the Kintail peaks, vanguard of a countless array; whilst, away north, beyond Skye, laid out as on an unfolded map, lie along the horizon the vague silhouettes of the Hebridean hills. This expanding view keeping step with the climber has one advantage over the still wider one at the top—he has a tremendous foreground, of which, in more senses than one, he forms a part.

It was far too late to think of continuing along the west ridge over Bhasteir to Bruach na Frithe; we must get down to Sligachan as quickly as possible. The sun had set and it was more than half-past eight when we were suddenly confronted by the Gendarme, keeping watch on the ruinous wall of ridge where it is almost cut in two by Nicolson's Chimney. I may be wrong; perhaps Nicolson's Chimney is one of the other gullies and clefts that come up here from the corrie; there are plenty by which the lower slopes on either side may be gained by an expert climber. At any rate we did not on this occasion scale the Gendarme, but dropped one after another into the chimney, and in the gathering twilight set off down the scree at a brisk canter. Very solemn it was in this silent cirque, with a sky yet brilliantly coloured stretching across from ridge to ridge. Not a breath of air was stirring, and not a bird or beast was audible; but far up among the pinnacles we could hear the clatter of stones shifted, not once but many times, as if a climber were making his way along some

difficult cliffs. So mysterious and ghostly were the sounds that several times we shouted and yodelled, but had no reply save the echoes. When we entered the hospitable doors of Sligachan Inn it was past ten, but our cordial welcome told us that belated mountaineers were not unknown there.

That evening was the perfection of beauty and serenity; we woke next morning to find ourselves imprisoned by such a deluge as surely Skye alone can produce, at least in the British Isles. The empty stream—we had crossed it dryshod at nightfall—grew in a few hours into a broad, torrential river, rolling great billows against the battered old bridge, which was islanded by the inundation. The following day, nevertheless, by a change that seemed miraculous, sunny weather reigned again, and the washed surface of the moor looked as dry as before. Having anticipated the breakfast hour, we set out at nine o'clock on a tramp through the glen to climb Blaven. Our fourth man wished us good-bye at Loch an Athain, as he was going round to Broadford; we heard afterwards that he could not make the ferryman hear, on the other side of Loch Slapin, and so waded across, as the tide was out, to save time. Turning into the hollow between Blaven and Marsco, we took an oblique course towards the junction of our mountain with the ridge of Clach Glas, one of the noblest piles of crag in Skye. This sequestered corner of Glen Sligachan is a little Eden. Though there are no trees and hardly a shrub, it is full of flowers, those of

the glen mingling with the mountain flora, violets lingering into July mixed with the butterworts. The moist air was sweet with the scent of bog-myrtle and heather, and the bees were hard at work.

Until we were under the cliffs at the head of the corrie, our ascent was merely a rough walk. Now a gangway of ledges took us up more rapidly, above which a pleasant scramble led on to the ridge. The last bit was up a stone-shoot with a very unstable floor, whence, whenever we halted, fatigued with its baffling condition, we looked back on what is perhaps the most extraordinary landscape in the Highlands. From this position, one has before one the whole mad procession of the Coolin, from sea-washed Gars Bheinn to Sgurr nan Gillean. On such a bright day their blackness is strangely intensified. They are as black as mountains of coal, and the moist slabs glistening like pyrites on their swart sides enforce the resemblance. We amused ourselves in picking out the various peaks by name, and even trying to pronounce some of the names. Gaelic scholars affirm that the spelling is phonetic. To an Englishman it appears that if you pronounce the consonants mute and reverse the sound of the vowels the noise emitted might as well be called the phonetic rendering —of Fheadain, for instance, or Banachdich. Close at hand, the scenery is dominated by the majestic bulk of the Clach Glas, sitting like a rough-hewn colossus astride of the ridge. We saw in a moment that we ought to have gone up the other end, if we had

meant to traverse it. On this side the face, near as it looks, cannot be reached without a toilsome detour to avoid the abrupt counterscarp of Blaven, and our time would not allow of this digression.

As soon as the ridge is attained there is a change in the scenery. From the crest Blaven descends by precipice after precipice in swift strides to the sea, which is suddenly revealed to right and left, encircling Skye. We could watch the cloud-shadows in motion beyond the Sound of Sleat. Loch Hourn, Loch Nevis, and the whole sequence of peak-surrounded fiords were gay with sunshine and blue water, and the day was limpid enough to show Ben Nevis and Ben Cruachan far away south. There were ptarmigan running about on the summit, which has two cairns between which we had to decide as to precedence. But a pair of tortoise-shell butterflies settling on the hot stones was a stranger sight in this barren place.

Our way down was by the long, straight ridge, broken into huge stairs by a series of transverse cliffs, which heads for Camasunary. From the glen it appears a succession of rock-towers; but it is perfectly easy, and all the way down there was leisure to watch the changes in the immense view. Whichever way we turned, the clustered peaks of Rum drew the eye like a magnet, as if they were the answering height to Blaven. And while we looked a few clouds gathered round the cone of Oreval, and came like a fleet of clippers with all their canvas outspread sailing across the blue spaces of sea and air between. They touched

and enveloped for an instant the ridge on which we stood; the sudden chill was refreshing, but the sun would not let them tarry. In Skye the weather lasts long if it lasts a day. The sun set amid purple prophecies of storm. A wet mist rolled over Loch Coruisk when the steamer on the morrow took us off at Loch Scavaig, and our au revoir to Skye was a true prognostication of more wet climbs and misty wanderings in years to come.



THE PEAKS OF ARRAN

VII

A SCRAMBLE IN ARRAN

To lone Glen Rosa's rocky dell
'Neath the sheer side of high Goatfell,
Where pinnacled cliffs of granite grey
Huge-piled in savage quaint array.

BEN NUIS¹ is the western terminal of the highest range in Arran, of which the eastern end is Goat Fell. It is not a well-known peak, the aspect it presents towards the more frequented points of view lacking interest, though as seen from Brodick its horn-like summit is a graceful termination to the crumpled chain of ridges and rocky steeples. The name Ben Nuis is descriptive, meaning the face-mountain, for the great feature of the hill is the precipice on its eastern front. This sheer cliff, about five hundred feet high, and covered with "boiler-plates," has long been regarded by rock-climbers in Arran as a standard of comparison for anything unusually difficult. What is a "boiler-plate"? To explain this graphic metaphor will help to explain the difficulties of the Ben Nuis climb. A large part of this wall of cliff is faced with slabs of granite, smooth in the mass, though rough in surface, their joints overlapping except where they are flush,

¹ Pronounced Noosh.

in either case offering hardly the vestige of a ledge between. Even when such slabs are inclined at a low angle they are exceedingly hard to climb; when they are steep, as here, they soon become unscalable. There is no way of ascending such a cliff except by a gully or similar fissure.

My companion, J. W. Puttrell, and I know a good deal more about boiler-plates and the idiosyncrasies of Arran climbing than we knew when we landed at Brodick after a choppy passage, and, looking up towards the sovereign heights of the island, beheld nothing but a turmoil of mist and cloud, out of which the rain descended as if to prohibit climbing for many days to come. We had never heard of Ben Nuis, though Goat Fell and Cir Mhor were names full of meaning; but we had begged our entertainer, L. J. Oppenheimer, who was holidaying in Arran, to find us something fresh and sweet, and when a glorious day broke we set out full of faith in the unknown name. The burns were in spate; the Rosa Riyer was brim-full, though clear as ever and alive with feeding trout. We quitted Glen Rosa just beyond the bridge over the Rough Burn, which mightily well deserved its name that day, for it tumbled and roared over the slabby bed in no pretty cascade, but in a tumult of foam. Breasting the steep brae, we ascended near the margin of the torrent to the boggy moor on the top.

Our party numbered six. Two of us had brought our wives, in anticipation of a day of easy and entertaining sport. The gentleman who came sixth, brother to

our host and guide, had a camera ; but the part he was to act in the sequel had nothing to do with photography. Crossing bogs, wading through purple heather, leaping streams, and fording the Rough Burn, we came under the cliffs. At the head of a rocky cove was the Ben Nuis Chimney, the titbit that Oppenheimer had reserved for our refined palates. Was it easy or difficult? We could not make up our minds, but we inclined to the former opinion, and at all events were engrossed with the problem of what we would do afterwards. We were half-encircled by rocky peaks. There Ben Tarsuinn displayed a range of buttresses and chimneys, and sent down towards the glen a long, steep rift that suggested possibilities of all kinds. Between towered the pinnacles of A' Chir, Chir Mhor, and the rest. What a splendid ridge-walk for the ladies! And, when we had dispatched our chimney, there was an interesting cleft in the southern curtain of Ben Nuis—a sort of Doctor's Chimney, we called it, in recollection of the famous Lake District climb. We would do that in the afternoon ; so we planned, while we sat at lunch round a bubbling source of delicious water below the chimney. We gave the trio of non-climbers rendezvous at the top ; going round by the end of the cliffs, they would surely not be up very much sooner than we.

Our chimney runs from top to bottom of the crags a little south of the peak. Even at Brodick, the thin black line, four or five hundred feet long, is plainly visible, though one can hardly realise how profound

is the fissure that it marks. The change in the angle of inclination half-way up is a feature that makes it easy to recognise. Scrambling up some steep grass, we came to the foot of our climb, and discovered at once the meaning of a musical murmuring that had tickled our ears—the gully was running with water. The pitch at the bottom was a water-slide about thirty-five feet high, with a thin stream spreading over a bed of rock a yard or two wide. But a drenching is the merest of trifles to our fugleman Puttrell when sport is in the wind, and light-heartedly and full of confidence he began to clamber up the watery slabs. Straightway, however, we received a lesson that might have taught us to leave such a climb alone, at least on the day after a downpour. Our leader strove in vain to establish any footing or handhold on the disintegrated granite—the rotten stuff crumbled at a touch. Time after time he endeavoured to advance; we each of us tried first one side of the slabs and then the other; we made hopeless attempts to scale the buttress to the right; but we succeeded only in getting well soaked, and tumbled back on one another in a heap. How these practically impossible things are ultimately done is not easy to explain. Neither Oppenheimer nor I succeeded finally in going up the water-slide without a certain measure of support from the rope; it would have wasted time to be too conscientious when once we had got a man on the top. But our leader by patient and plucky efforts won his way up, and was loudly cheered by us and by the friends watching from the fell-side. He managed

to secure a grip, a sorry and doubtful grip it was, by standing on Oppenheimer's shoulders, who in turn was propped and steadied by me. Oppenheimer then held his foot while he struggled upwards an inch at a time, digging his toes into the mossy channel and spreading himself out so as to utilise every particle of friction. All this occupied an unconscionable length of time, and all the while the diverted stream was running through our comrade's clothes and bubbling out at his boots. From below, the rocks belied their nature. What looked like a handy knob proved to be a rounded corner impossible to grasp ; it was so all the way up.

Above the water-slide a sharp slope of crumbling rock, down which, as the absence of loose fragments told us, a small torrent was wont to sweep in bad weather, led into a deep and gloomy recess, which a cluster of jammed blocks thirty feet up converted into a cave. This part of the chimney is not unlike the highest part of Moss Ghyll on Scawfell. The parallel walls are not quite vertical, so that one side overhangs, and a perpetual dropping of water sprinkled us bountifully. To propose climbing such a straight-walled cavern seemed absurd ; its appearance was utterly forbidding. But Puttrell, with his usual alertness, saw a way up, and we trusted that fortune would make things easier beyond the natural bridge over the chasm. He mounted to this by his favourite method, back against one wall and feet against the other ; we joined him, and sat on this curious perch for our first rest. A few feet higher a new difficulty

begins, a pitch resembling the water-slide but much steeper. Two of us were not unwilling to beat a retreat when our leader's attempt to surmount this barrier failed; but he confronted it again, undaunted by the paucity of holds and the certainty of a disastrous fall if aught gave way. Once more he retired, and we had made up our minds to descend, when, moved by some reluctant impulse, he grappled with the obstacle again and, to our surprise, it yielded.

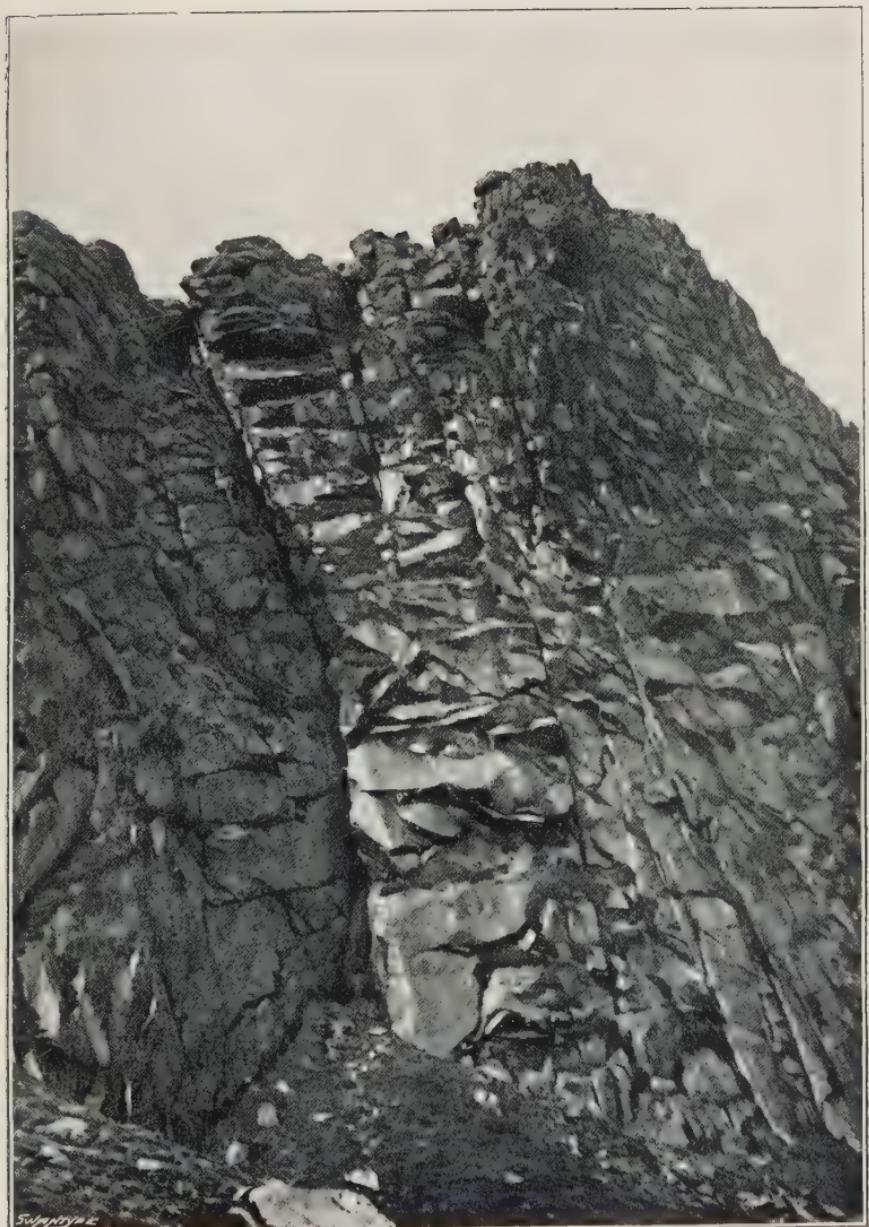
Beyond it we found ourselves in a deep and narrow cleft, with an inclined floor so slippery that we could maintain our position only by wedging with back and feet against the opposite walls. These walls streamed with moisture, which struck through and chilled us to the bone. A little way above us frowned an obstacle of a different kind. Massy fragments of rock had tumbled across and blocked up the chimney entirely, but for a hole in the roof of a funnel-shaped cave. Gazing upwards as well as we could in our constricted attitude, we saw our leading man climb laboriously to a point just under the cave, when he disappeared to one side. He was an extraordinary time making himself safe up there, and we began to wax impatient. His answer was to offer me the honour of leading straight up through the cave and the hole, as I was the slimmest of the three; but this perilous course had no fascination. When, after a struggle, we joined him on a scanty ledge at the side, we found our situation critical. The chimney itself, in its wet condition, was too much for us; the great rock-masses enclosing it on

this side were appallingly steep; the other side was a hopeless precipice. Could we retreat? We felt that such a course was hazardous in the extreme. The only way for the hindmost man, who of course could not be assisted by the rope, to return down the water-slide at the bottom was to slide—or tumble—down the slippery slope, trusting to luck for our catching him safely. And the water-slide, unfortunately, was not the most serious thing we had left in our rear.

We crept round a corner on to the face of the mountain. On a shelf overhung by the great rock buttressing the chimney we found a little plot of grass and bilberries, islanded amid the crags and hopelessly cut off from access in all directions save one. We sat down to divide our only refreshment, two tablets of chocolate; ate up the bilberries, and debated what was to be done. The painful feature of the situation was that our wives were on the fell-side yonder, and must by this time have surmised that something was amiss, since three or four hours had already elapsed and we were long overdue at the summit. They were visible as dots among the rocks and scree far down; we hoped the distance would save them from understanding how serious was our plight. One chance remained, but it was exceedingly hazardous and the issue uncertain. The rock overhanging the shelf where we sat had a steep corner at the side abutting on the chimney. Could we surmount this corner, we should at least get away from our shelf, and perchance the rocks would be easier above it. As a possible anchorage, a cleft was

discovered going right through under the big rock, and having re-arranged the rope we threaded it here; I remained on the outside holding the rope, while the other two, being carefully secured, returned to the ledge on the inside wall. Puttrell now made a persevering attempt to climb the aforesaid corner, backed up by Oppenheimer. Twice he renewed the attempt, but was obliged at last to give it up. We scanned every inch of rock for the slightest possibility of another way over. No, there was absolutely nothing else to try. Were we to be driven to descend again by the chimney? Our hearts sank at the idea.

But I weighed a stone and a half less than Puttrell. Perhaps the two of them might support my weight a few inches higher on the corner, and so enable me to grasp some kind of hold. Once more the rope was re-arranged. Puttrell was lashed to the rock, while my rope was threaded through the hole and allowed to go out inch by inch as I ascended. I climbed on Puttrell's shoulders, then on to the steep corner, where he held my foot firmly against the rock while I stretched up towards a flimsy coating of grass and bilberry on the sloping top of the buttress. Would it hold even for a few moments while I scrambled across it? Spreading my body over the rock and digging both hands into the fibrous growth, I cautiously wriggled upwards and clutched an angle of the rock beyond. The first step was safely accomplished, but no direct advance was possible. The only hope was in a traverse out on the face of the cliff. Yet the outlook in that direction was



THE BEN NUIS CHIMNEY

(The Chimney from foot to top is over 400ft. high)

far from inviting, overhanging blocks and steep slabs alternating with narrow strips of herbage: the holds were as scarce as ever. In a climb of any difficulty nothing is more disconcerting than a vegetable hold. I felt it was touch and go with me all the way; but at all events Oppenheimer with the threaded rope would be able to check me if I came off, the rocks were not jagged, and a fall would hardly be fatal. Nevertheless, I felt far from comfortable as I glanced down over some forty or fifty feet of boiler plates to the grassy patch where my descent would probably end on the brink of a far deeper plunge. At one point, in balancing across a gap, with right foot on a sloping splinter and left hand pressed upon a rounded corner, I felt my fingers somehow come away. For the fraction of a second I thought myself gone; but regaining my balance, I shifted my weight across to the splinter, hardly daring to breathe, straddled the gap, and crept round the corner to a ledge. Thence, scrambling up a few feet, I worked my way slowly back to a point immediately above my two comrades, who of course were all the while concealed from view by the intervening rocks. The footing was bad, nothing but a yielding cushion of turf and bilberry; but it was wasting time to search for a rock-ledge. I must stand as firmly as possible and keep the rope taut as they came up, not giving them a chance to slip. It was an immense relief when Puttrell's head came into sight. With him safe, we both held the rope for Oppenheimer.

And now we congratulated ourselves that the worst was over. Descending into our gully, we found we were on the roof of the cave that we dared not climb: after all these dangerous and complicated manœuvres we had only ascended a few feet. But now, it seemed, everything changed for the better. Not only was the slope easier, but the tilt sideways, which had doubled the awkwardness of the lower portion, was not so acute. Heartened up by the prospect of a speedy escape, we went ahead again. It would be tedious to describe the next few pitches in detail. They were neither so difficult as those we had climbed nor so exposed; better still, they were comparatively dry. After being converted into temporary watercourses, we felt this was something to be thankful for. Puttrell led up with his usual address, and all was going merrily, when he suddenly looked back and informed us that we were stopped again. We hurried up to see what new monster stood in our path. We had reached a spot where the chimney expands into a wide cavity, with smooth walls on either hand, and, right in the angle, a deep, inner chimney continuing the line of the main fissure up and out of sight. This inner chimney overhung in one part, and here a mass of earth and ferns was lodged, resting apparently on a chock-stone. It was a complete barricade. We looked despairingly round. The right-hand buttress appeared unscalable. On the other side we were walled in by a cliff nearly sheer. It struck me that there was a bare possibility of a wary climber's finding a hard and dangerous way

up it for some distance, but only in the last extremity; my suggestion met with no approval, and I was bound to confess that it looked a desperate venture.

Once more we climbed round the buttress on to the face. Here a grassy shelf extended for several yards, with a beetling wall above and a clear drop below strictly limiting our movements. It was an area as well defended against entrance or exit as the platform where we had been blockaded previously; and, to make it worse for any daring attempt of our leader to climb round the obstacles, there was no belay for the rope. Bitter was our disappointment. We had almost forgotten our friends on the hillside, who had been watching our proceedings all this while, and, though too far away to see exactly what we were at, must naturally have been in a state of extreme disquietude. We could descry them on a curving shoulder of Ben Nuis that commanded a full-length view of the climb. We were on the stage, they in the dress-circle; and probably they were in momentary expectation of witnessing a tragedy. A shout came faintly on our ears, "How are you getting on?" Puttrell shouted in reply, "Only moderate." This was painting the situation in quiet colours. "Shall I go for a rope?" was the next message that we made out, after it had been twice repeated. We looked at each other, but no man assented to this extreme proposal, and the answer was, "Not yet."

We retired into the cavity. Puttrell tried the buttress, with very little hope of succeeding, by climb-

ing on Oppenheimer's shoulders while I held them both with the rope; but the only result was that the human pyramid collapsed and Oppenheimer got his hand damaged. He tested the chimney, only to confirm his belief that it would not go. The outlook was as grim as grim could be. We held a few moments' debate. We had done our best, and there was no reasonable hope of extricating ourselves; we decided that a rope should be sent for. The necessary instructions were shouted to our friends, and Oppenheimer's brother at once started for Brodick to fetch a rescue party.

We had been in the chimney six hours. We were soaked to the skin, wretchedly cold, for the chimney looks north; we were as hungry as wolves. The rescuers would take hours to get here, they could not be expected till after nightfall; in all probability our deliverance could not be effected until dawn. Our faces grew rueful indeed when we thought of the night we were to spend in a place that had nothing to recommend it but its security. The novel and inglorious experience of being rescued had no charms. As a forlorn hope I went and examined the sheer left wall again. It was smooth and ledgeless except at the joints, where tufts of herbage sprouted, and here and there where the decayed rock left a crumbling corner sticking out that might lend a little support if handled gingerly. If it had to be tested, I was evidently the destined victim; both my comrades were too heavy to utilise such frail supports.

I was placed in the middle of the eighty-foot rope ; they were at the ends. Oppenheimer stood well back in the recess, his duty being to jerk me in quickly in case of a fall. Puttrell stood further out, so as to catch me, if possible, in the descent. I crawled on to the lowest tuft with the utmost caution ; it held whilst I brought all my weight up. Standing erect and scrambling on to the next tuft was an affair of nice balance. Once more I pulled myself cautiously erect. As I crept outwards and upwards, aslant, an uninterrupted view down the gully opened beneath me, and a touch on a flake of rock that had promised to be the key to the whole stratagem sent it clattering down the chasm. This forced me further to the right. One bigger flake, with a clump of vegetation wedged behind it threatened to follow the other. There was no alternative—I had to embrace the possible foe ; and it never budged while I swarmed on to the top, and there found myself at the end of my tether. With the hand disengaged I undid the rope, pulled it up, and tied myself on again at the end. Forty feet higher and seventy above my companions in adversity I found a safe stance, from which a plain and easy course appeared right to the summit. All shouted hilariously when I called out this cheering news. Puttrell came up in a few minutes, we let down the rope again for Oppenheimer ; the tension was relaxed, and away we went up the hundred feet of rock and scree to the top. We came through a chaotic heap of boulders, with caves and dark passages between, beyond which we found

the two ladies, who had stationed themselves to mark the spot for the rescuers. Their relief was not exceeded by ours, and, I need not say, we bitterly regretted the ordeal to which we had unwittingly condemned them. We had had the interest and excitement to sustain us ; their suspense had not even had the relief of our transient successes. Thoroughly famished, we devoured the relics of the midday meal, and, still eating, set off rapidly towards the glen in the hope of forestalling the rescue party.

The sun set as we went down. Not only the forked pinnacles of Arran, but also the peaks of the mainland as far north as Ben Cruachan stood out against a sky of immaculate purity. Eastwards the cloudy outline of the Ayrshire hills marked, as it were, the boundaries of night. The encircling sea had the unearthly tints of evening ; Ailsa Craig was a soft shadow floating on deep blues and violets ; the stony crests all about us gleamed and flushed. What were physical discomforts and fatigue with such glories around us ? The least beautiful side of Goat Fell, a wilderness of shapeless rock and scree, was radiant with light and colour, a splendid object rising out of the twilight depths of Glen Rosa. We dropped into the glen as darkness came on, and had not gone far when we met our friend coming up with a band of keepers, shepherds, and tourists, carrying lanterns, a long rope, and brandy. The last was the only succour of which we availed ourselves. We apologised for their disappointment ; they congratulated us on our escape. The brandy came

from a farm down the glen, and the farmer, we were told, though of the weaker sex, was man enough to promise us a horse-whipping as soon as she set eyes on us. No doubt we richly deserved it. Our own sufferings had some compensation afterwards, when we learned on sure authority that our climb had never been done before, and that several good men had been deterred by its ugly appearance. But the satisfaction was outweighed by the sense that our wives had suffered torments of anxiety through our rashness.

The only other climb described in this book that stands comparison in difficulty and hazard with the Ben Nuis Chimney is the Crowberry Ridge. That has been climbed by our route once since, the party being headed by Mr Harold Raeburn, one of the distinguished leaders in the attempts on Mount Everest. So far as can be ascertained, the Ben Nuis Chimney has never been touched by any other climbers. I do not think that either of the two surviving of the three who found it so formidable would attempt it again, even if the reward of success were to have our best climbs all over again. Such was Oppenheimer's opinion too. He, alas! like so many of our finest cragsmen, took arms for us, and was one of those who fell.

Old comrade, when we climbed the peaks together,
Were you preparing for a nobler test?
Had you caught glimpses of a loftier crest
Than that we gazed at from our shelf of heather,

Lifting more distant snows above the nether
Barriers of precipice to heights unguessed?
How fearless were you when we strove in jest,
And fought no sterner foe than wind and weather!

Ah, had I known our sport was but a training
For mightier bouts on heights sublimer far,
I might have won the secret of your daring,
By failure never foiled, your knightly bearing,
Your fortitude and patience uncomplaining,
And climbed with you where the dead heroes are.



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